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FORMERLY FLYNN'S WEEKLY

JUNE 8
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vs

THE MASKED JURY

by
JUDSON
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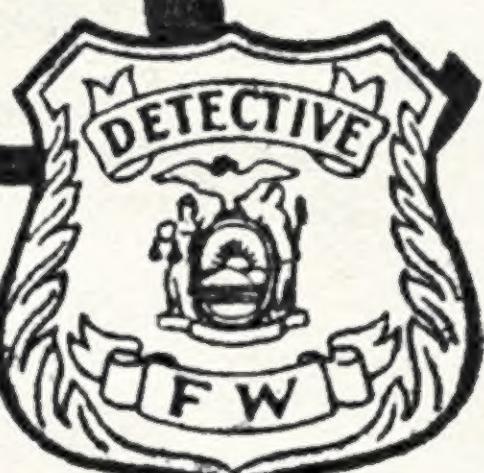
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Volume 137

JUNE 8, 1940

Number 4

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A RED STAR Magazine

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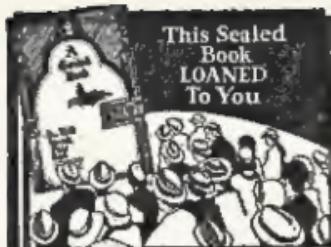
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The Green Shirts fell back on the
Capitol steps



The Hunt Club frees an undergraduate body from serfdom and a great city from the coils of the Green Viper

The Masked Jury

SINCE this isn't a gunshot wound I'm not bound by law to report it," said Dr. Carver, looking up from the bandage he had wrapped around John Jericho's hand. "But out of curiosity I'd like to know how you got this injury."

John Jericho, who towered a good six inches above the doctor, glanced over the top of the medico's head to Geffory Saville, who was perched on the arm of a chair in the corner of the room. Then he said, with a matter of

fact air: "Someone dropped a nickel in the subway. I was stepped on in the crush trying to pick it up."

Dr. Carver shrugged. "I deserved that for not minding my own business," he said. Then he looked squarely at his tall, red-headed patient. "I have repaired other injuries of this type recently. That's why I wondered Bones crushed in the hand . . . also in the feet. Deliberately and malicious inflicted."

Again Jericho and Saville ex-

A silent redhead was splitting their ranks with
crushing hate



By Judson P. Philips

changed glances, Saville, who looked enough like Ronald Colman, the actor, to be his double, tapped a cigarette on the back of his silver case. "That sounds interesting, Doctor," he said.

"Of course there can be no connection," said the doctor, "because we don't have any subways here in Central City."

"Quite," said Saville.

"And in any event, you gentlemen are strangers here, I take it," said the doctor.

"Our first visit, Doctor," said Saville.

"You plan to stay long?"

"We hadn't, Doctor. But your remark about deliberately inflicted in-

juries interests me," Saville remarked.

The doctor snipped off the ends of Jericho's bandage with surgical scissors. "There is another point of similarity," he said. "The other people I attended would not give a straight answer either. Well, gentlemen, that's all I can do for you now. You should have this looked at again in a day or two, Mr. Jericho, wherever you are."

"Thanks, Doctor." Jericho started for the office door.

Saville didn't move from the arm of his chair. "If you were guessing, Doctor," he said, "you might assume that these injuries were acquired in the process of some sort of third degree."

"Precisely," said Dr. Carver.

Saville drew a deep breath. "Dr. Carver, is green a popular color in Central City?" he asked.

The doctor hesitated by his cabinet. He didn't look at Saville. "That's a peculiar question, Mr. Saville."

"Is it?"

Carver turned. He still held the surgical scissors in his hand. "Green," he said slowly, "has become a very popular color here in the last six months. Incidentally, I am a fool to talk about it to strangers."

"Perhaps," said Saville. He studied the end of his cigarette. "Several hours ago four men were found dead at a railroad station in a small place called Highpoint. These four men well-known members of an organization known as the Green Shirts, Doctor. They belonged to the New York Division."

"I had heard the rumor," said the doctor, cautiously. "I heard these men were followed from New York by an outfit which calls itself The Park Avenue Hunt Club and - er - polished off."

"Rumor is an extraordinary thing," said Saville. His gray eyes suddenly held the doctor in a steady stare. "Jericho and I came from Highpoint this morning."

The doctor's eyebrows shot upward. "So!" he said softly. He reached out to his desk and picked up the telephone receiver. "Miss Marshall? I am not to be disturbed for the next half hour." He put the phone back on the desk. "Gentlemen, sit down for a moment, won't you? If you are interested in the color green perhaps we have something to talk about after all."

THE American public knew very little about the Liberty Crusaders, or Green Shirts, at that time. An occasional squib about them in the newspapers created almost no interest.

About a month before the day when Saville and Jericho visited Dr. Carver's office in Central City, there had been a stir in New York. The headquarters of the Crusaders had been raided, several of their members killed, their Divisional Commander lodged in jail. At the same time stores of ammunition, guns, hand grenades and other weapons had been found by the police.

Underground rumor had it that the Green Shirts had been attacked by that notorious group of men who called themselves The Park Avenue Hunt Club. That the police had been notified by the Hunt Club *after* the job was done. The Hunt Club was almost legendary in New York . . . in fact, all over the country. In the decade after repeal they had waged a relentless war on crime and criminals, acting as judge, jury, and executioners in one. The identity of the Hunt Club's members was known only to one or two people. Certainly suave Geoffrey Saville, well-known in New York Society, John Jericho, redhead big game hunter, Arthur Hallam, rotund, bespectacled gourmet, chess master, ex-medical student, and walking encyclopedia of odd facts, were not suspected. Yet these three men with Wu, Saville's Chinese servant, were the whole membership of the Hunt Club. After a year of retirement they had swung back into action to fight the Liberty Crusaders.

The Crusaders were a far greater menace than the public realized. They had hundreds of thousands of members scattered over the country. Their announced purpose was to battle subversive elements in the United States. To prepare themselves against this alleged threat, the members were drilled in camps, taught military tactics, street fighting, and scientific methods of sab-

otage. Their true purpose was grave and sinister. Commanded by a national Leader, whose identity was unknown, and financed by men who kept carefully in the shadows, the Green Shirts' real aim was to take complete control of the country. They had detailed plans, ready to put into operation at a signal from The Leader, plans to take over factories, communications systems, munitions plants, power plants. Each member of the Green Shirts had an assignment which he was prepared to carry out when the signal came.

So far the Hunt Club had made little progress. They had smashed one cell of the organization in New York, only to see it flower again. They had just struck a second blow at this group, a crippling blow. In the process of this action Saville and Jericho found themselves in Central City. These minor victories did not bring satisfaction to them, however.

"Until we can get at the roots of the organization," Saville said, "we have little more than nuisance value. Until we can strike at The Leader himself and the men who finance him, we can make little headway."

Twice the man who might have led them to the heart of the Green Shirt organization had crossed their path

and twice he had slipped through their fingers. They knew him only as "the man in gray," tall, slender, soft-voiced, one eye concealed by a frosted lens in his spectacles. This man, they knew, was the contact between The Leader and his divisional commanders. If they could lay him by the heels, they might be on the way to success.

Meanwhile they listened to all gossip, to all rumors, in the hope of getting a lead. That was why Saville and Jericho were so much interested in what Dr. Carver had to say.

"YOU have arrived here at an opportunity moment," Dr. Carver told Saville and Jericho, "if your purpose is to observe. I will take you down to the public square in a moment where you will see a sample of the feeling here in Central City."

"The public square?"

Carver nodded. "This is the state's capital city you know, Mr. Saville. We have the State University here as well as the government machinery. I should tell you that the Green Shirts operate quite openly here. They are regarded in a great many sections as a worthy, patriotic organization. I'm afraid a large percentage of our businessmen and many of the youngsters who belong to the moneyed social families are members. You can't walk down the streets of the town without seeing Green Shirts in uniform."

"The rats," said Jericho, angrily.

"Jewish merchants in the town have been pretty badly treated. Peter Hazzitt, editor of the uncontrolled evening paper, has been beaten up once. Advertisers have withdrawn from his paper so that he is just hanging on by his teeth . . . this because he has openly and frankly criticised the Green Shirts, described them in their true color."

"Which is yellow!" snapped Jericho.

"Be that as it may, Mr. Jericho, they are strong. The present excitement has to do with the University. Naturally liberal-minded professors have been screaming at the top of their lungs about the Green Shirts. One man in particular, Professor Morrison, has been fighting the Green Shirts tooth and nail in his class rooms. Day before yesterday he was dropped from the University faculty. This morning a body of students is marching on the capitol to protest this action. That is what I want you to see."

"Can they do any good?" Saville asked

Dr Carver shrugged. "They can focus an unpleasant spotlight of publicity on our government, which will cause it to squirm. They threaten to go on strike. The *Sentinel*, the government controlled paper, is already screaming about Communist educators. Professor Morrison has been branded 'a tool of Stalin's.' The students are being accused of Red affiliations. It's a very effective counter weapon in these days." Carver glanced at his watch. "I think, gentlemen, if you are interested in seeing this demonstration, we should get under way."

DR CARVER knew his way around Central City. He found a place on a balcony at the Jerome House, just across the square from the Capitol, where they could see everything.

"George Jerome is governor of the State," he explained to Saville and Jericho. "He is also the big man in Central City. Head of the board of directors of the leading bank; owner of the big chemical factory; streets and hotels named after him." The doctor smiled grimly. "One of the interesting sidelights to this event, gentlemen, is that Jerome's daughter, Theodora, known as Teddy hereabouts, will be marching in that parade of students. It's caused no end of comment. You see, she's in love with young Hazlitt, the newspaper editor, and she's 'seen the light.' George Jerome is furious. It hasn't helped Hazlitt's chances of keeping his newspaper running."

The streets were lined with people. Saville, scowling, saw that there were several hundred green-shirted gentlemen mingling in the crowd.

"Just in case there should be a 'communist riot,'" said Dr Carver. He was

angry. "By God, if they were Communists I'd be down there with a club in my hand. But they aren't, gentlemen. They're looking for fair play . . . for a just hearing."

It was then that the procession of marching students appeared, about three blocks from the square. As they drew closer Saville felt his muscles grow tense; sensed a strange pumping excitement in his chest. These were just kids . . . boys and girls. Fine looking, clear-eyed youngsters.

They came toward the Capitol, marching six abreast down the middle of the street. They carried signs and placards. The leader, a tall, bronzed youth who might have been a half back on the football team carried one which interested Saville.

"WHO DO WE SEE?
WHO IS GOVERNOR OF THE
STATE—
GEORGE JEROME OR JAN
GERBER???"

"Gerber is local Commander of the Green Shirts," Dr Carver explained.

"That's asking 'em," said Jericho.

Saville felt a faint chill run along his spine. It was a sort of sixth sense with him, a signal of impending danger. It had stood him in good stead many times before. He stirred restlessly. He couldn't tell what it was he feared. But danger!

The parade came on till it was about a block from the Capitol. Then the first thing happened. There was a wail of sirens. Around a corner came a huge fire engine, followed by another and still another. They headed at top speed for the parade.

Jericho's fingers gripped savagely at Saville's arm. For a moment it seemed the leaders in the parade must certainly be run down. The rolling

red monsters did not slacken speed for an instant.

With cries of warning the young people broke for the sidewalks. There was a scream of agony. Someone had not been quick enough in dodging those trucks. Saville saw a boy being helped to safety by two of his friends. His legs dragged grotesquely behind him.

THE rats! The dirty rats!" Jericho shouted. Dr. Carver turned, white-faced, and ran into the hotel. He was needed down there.

Saville watched. The leader of the parade was rallying his forces. Slowly those kids got into the formation again and started forward.

Then the second thing happened. From the sidewalks, in orderly procession, moved a company of Green Shirts. They formed in a solid body at the foot of the Capitol steps. Saville saw they were armed with blackjack, standard equipment for the Modern Minute Men, as they called themselves. Some of them carried guns quite openly.

"Let's get out of here!" said Jericho.

He and Saville hurried down a flight of stairs, through the hotel lobby, and out onto the street. They elbowed their way through the crowds on the sidewalk until they were out on the street itself, in the clear. The parade had halted.

"Break it up, you damn Reds," a Green Shirt was ordering the young man at the head of the procession.

"We want to see the governor," the boy said.

"Well, he don't want to see you. Break it up before you get hurt."

"We're going in," said the boy. He turned, signaled his followers to advance.

Saville cried out a warning, but it was lost in the roar of the crowd. The Green Shirt's arm rose, and fell. The boy dropped his sign, flung up his arms. Half a dozen more Green Shirts were on him as he fell. The parade faltered.

John Jericho lowered his head and charged. A football coach would have swooned with joy at the sight of him. He smashed his way through the crowd, leaving a path in his wake wide enough for a truck to follow. There was no truck, but Saville was at his heels.

The wave of green, too late, saw the counter-attack coming. Jericho was in the center of that group that slugged at the fallen boy before they knew of danger. Figures in green seemed to fly away from the center of the action as if there had been an explosion. Jericho's fists flashed and jabbed into white, frightened faces. He caught one of the Green Shirts who had a revolver strapped at his side, yanked him close for an instant, and then kicked him savagely in the pit of the stomach. The Green Shirt's gun was in Jericho's left hand. He yanked his own holstered weapon from under his arm pit. He stood over the fallen boy, like a colossus, a gun in each hand. Saville was at his side. He, too, had taken a gun from one of the Green Shirts.

"Come on, you murdering rats! Open up! We're coming!"

"Arrest those men!" A Green Shirt, with the stripes of a commander on his sleeves, stood on one of the upper steps. The Green Shirts hesitated.

"Come and take me yourself, Gerber! And here's how good your chances are!" Jericho shouted. The gun in his right hand spat flame. The cap on Gerber's head whizzed off into space. The Green Shirt leader dove for

safety behind the phalanx of his men.

"Pick up the boy and get him out of here before he's trampled to death, John," Saville said. "I'll take care of these little pets."

He walked slowly forward toward the wavering Green Shirts. "You can open fire if you choose," he said coldly. "If you do you will murder dozens of these youngsters . . . your own kids! Now make way!"

Saville heard a shout behind him. He didn't turn, but suddenly he was aware of someone at his elbow. A girl! Her face was white, her eyes blazing with anger. She was carrying the sign the fallen boy had dropped. Her dark hair was blown back from her face.

"I don't know who you are," she said to Saville, "but thank God for you. I'm Teddy Jerome, the governor's daughter. They won't dare open up on me."

"Good girl," said Saville.

"You and your friend better duck while you can, or you'll be shot in the back. You've bitten off more than you can chew, Mr. - er -"

"Saville is the name, Miss Jerome. And I think my friend and I will be sticking around for a while."

II

FRACTURED spine," said Dr. Carver, his voice shaking with anger. He had just returned to his office from the hospital where he had examined the boy hit by the fire truck.

Saville and Jericho and Teddy Jerome, the governor's daughter, were with him. The march on the Capitol had not produced results of any consequence. Teddy and a half dozen other students had finally seen George Jerome; had been warned by the governor that he could not be responsible

for their safety if they insisted on "inciting to riot." Professor Morrison's position had not been changed. One boy's back was broken; another was suffering from a possible concussion inflicted by Green Shirt blackjack.

"You see what we're up against," the girl said.

"The police?" Saville suggested. "Surely the Green Shirts who beat up that boy on the Capitol steps . . ."

"Seventy-five per cent of our police force are members of the Green Shirts," Dr. Carver interrupted.

"There are six or seven hundred members here in Central City," Teddy Jerome said. "They are armed, and they don't have to worry about being molested by the law." She looked earnestly at Saville. "You two were grand out there this morning. It's the first time anyone has struck back at them. But you'd better get out of town as quickly as you can. You and Mr. Jericho simply aren't a match for them even if there was any reason for you to fight our fight."

"There is a reason," said Saville. "And I've wired to New York for two friends of ours. They should arrive by plane sometime tonight. We're not leaving, Miss Jerome. If you care to help us with information, fine. If you don't, we will have to find out our own facts."

"You don't know what you're undertaking, Mr. Saville," Carver said.

"I think we do, Doctor. We have seen Gerber Who are the other big shots in the organization here?"

"There's one man who's the most dangerous of all, Mr. Saville. His name is Jankowski. He was driving that fire truck that ran down the boy. He's a gunman, a killer. He heads a sort of flying squad that is responsible for all the rough stuff."

"Where is the headquarters?"

"The old Prentiss place on the outskirts of town," said Teddy Jerome. "They meet there quite openly. The place is guarded by sentries. If anyone tries to get in they are soundly beaten up. Some kids here in town, who were curious, were thrashed within an inch of their lives when they sneaked in."

"Do you know when they meet?"

"There are gangs of them at the Prentiss place every night. Gerber and Jankowski live there . . . like kings, Mr. Saville. Servants, liquor, expensive automobiles. No one really knows who isn't a member. And no one who is a member will talk. Things happen to people who talk."

Saville and Jericho looked at each other. "A visit to the Prentiss place tonight would seem to be indicated, eh, John?" said Saville.

"Describe this Jankowski," said Jericho. "I would like to settle with him personally for that truck driving job!"

Dr. Carver shook his head gravely. "I wish I could share your optimism, gentlemen. But these birds play for keeps."

"So do we, Doctor," said Saville, quietly. "So do we."

THE Prentiss place on the outskirts of Central City was one of those huge estates which are rapidly disappearing in America. It was a great, three-story, stone house, surrounded by acres of lawns and gardens. The whole place was surrounded by a high stone wall, broken only at the main entrance which consisted of massive iron gates and a gatekeeper's house built into the wall itself.

Saville and Jericho, in a car which they rented in town, drove to within about five hundred yards of the entrance

where they concealed the car in a wood to the right of the road. There was a good deal of traffic toward the Prentiss place. They could see the house, brilliantly lighted from top to bottom.

"No effort at concealment," said Saville. "Let's have a closer look."

"Okay, lead me to the rats," said the redhead.

As they approached the entrance they could see the wall; a wire was strung across the top.

"Ten to one it's electrically charged," grumbled Jericho, "and a fine supply of broken glass on top of the wall itself."

From the bushes they watched the cars arriving. Each car stopped at the gate. A watchman appeared, flashed a torch on the car, and then opened the gate. In the light from the torch they could see that the occupants of the cars all wore the uniform of the Liberty Crusaders.

Saville smiled grimly in the darkness. "Did you ever hook rides on the back of a car when you were a kid, John?"

"Uh-huh."

"That's how we go in, one at a time." They were in the bushes directly opposite the gate. A car drove up, headed in and stopped. The gatekeeper came out, flashing his light on the men in the car. Saville slipped quickly across the dusty road, stepped onto the rear bumper and clung precariously to the sides of the car's luggage trunk, spread-eagled flat against the back of the car. Jericho, waiting, held a gun in his hand. If the gatekeeper saw Saville and gave the alarm there would be action. But as the car moved in the man did not turn to watch it, occupying himself with closing the gates. Jericho sighed and slipped his gun back into the holster. Another car was coming along the road.

THERE were thirty or forty cars in a parking space near the house. Jericho remained motionless, clinging to the back of the sedan on which he had ridden in. The Green Shirts got out and went directly into the house.

"John!"

Saville, bent low to stay out of the line of vision of anyone who might be watching from the house, came quietly up beside his friend.

"Duck soup," said Jericho. "They're so sure no one will risk coming in that they aren't very careful. Not bright."

"The sentries Carver spoke of apparently stick to the wall," said Saville. "They don't expect anyone to try to crash the gates."

"My heart bleeds for them," said Jericho. "Where do we go from here?"

"This looks like something special tonight," Saville said. "There must be two or three hundred of them. Let's get around the other side of the house I'm betting on a terrace; probably French windows. We may be able to see something."

"Right."

"Look, John. We'd better get straight on one thing. If there's any kind of trouble, it's every man for himself. We meet at the car if we can. If you're there first, don't wait for me . . . and vice versa. We'll catch up with each other at Carver's . . . if we make it. Hallam and Wu should be there when we get back."

"Okay, son. Let's go."

Saville was right about the house. At the back was a wide brick terrace overlooking a sunken garden. Half a dozen sets of French windows, all brilliantly lighted, opened onto the terrace. At the moment there were a dozen or so Green Shirts on the terrace smoking, laughing together. Inside the French windows was an enormous room, prob-

ably used as a ballroom by the original owner. Hundreds of chairs were arranged in orderly fashion.

"Going to be a meeting of some sort," Saville whispered. "As soon as these birds go in we should be able to get up onto the terrace itself."

"If we had a couple of rapid fire guns," said Jericho, "this would be like shooting fish in a barrel."

A Green Shirt came to one of the French windows.

"Inside, boys. The fun's about to begin," he said.

The men on the terrace moved slowly into the room beyond Saville and Jericho, staying in the shadow of the house, moved forward onto the terrace, taking up positions on either side of one of the open windows.

Inside the chairs were all occupied about two hundred and seventy-five of them, Saville estimated. On a raised platform at the end of the room three Green Shirts sat behind a flat topped table. One of them was Gerber, the Leader. The other was a huge, tousle-headed man, swarthy, with arms like a gorilla. From Carver's description Saville knew he was Jankowski, the gunman. The third man had prematurely white hair, dark eyebrows, and very keen gray eyes. He looked like a prosperous business man of some sort.

Gerber stood up and rapped on the table with a gavel. His pale blue eyes blinked as he glanced at the cut glass chandelier that hung in the center of the room.

"The meeting will come to order," he said. "Hail to our Leader!"

Two hundred and seventy-five men raised their arms upward in a stiff, fascist salute. "Hail to our Leader!" they thundered.

"Before we proceed with the business at hand," said Gerber, "are there any

reports on the two men who caused the disturbance at the Capitol this morning?"

A man in one of the front rows stood up. "Nothing definite to report," he said. "We have heard that they were seen coming out of Dr. Carver's office before the parade this morning. One of them had an injured hand. After the parade they seem to have disappeared. They have probably left town."

Gerber's lips were compressed in a thin slit. "You will keep looking for them in case they are still here," he said. "That sort of thing cannot go unpunished. I want a report every day until they are caught, or until you are certain they have left Central City."

"Very good, sir."

"The police should be able to aid you in this."

Another man stood up. "We've sent out a general alarm for them," he said. "Charged them with inciting to riot. All the men on the force have descriptions. If they're still here they'll be picked up."

"Good work, Commissioner."

Outside Jericho muttered under his breath. "The Police Commissioner, for God sake!"

BRING in the prisoner!" Gerber ordered

A door at the far end of the room opened and two Green Shirts came in, an elderly man, his arms pinioned, between them. They yanked him forward unceremoniously to a place in front of the raised platform. There was an angry mutter from the assembled Green Shirts. The prisoner turned to look at them, coolly. He had thin gray hair, a high, intelligent forehead, a straight, firm mouth. There was an expression of contempt in his gray eyes. One of the jailers yanked him around

to face Gerber and the other two men.

"Pay attention," he snarled.

Gerber looked down at the old man. "You know why you are here, Professor Morrison?"

"Yes, I know why I am here, Mr. Gerber," the professor said. His voice was clear, unafraid.

"You were ordered to leave Central City after you were dismissed from the University."

"I am afraid, Mr. Gerber, that I do not recognize your authority to give such orders."

The man at the professor's right struck him a flat-handed blow on the cheek. "No insolence, you damned Communist rat!"

"It is not healthy to disobey our orders," Gerber said.

"I recognize that fact, Mr. Gerber. I have seen samples of your disciplinary action. But to tell you the truth, I am quite willing to become a victim, if it will help to draw attention to your illegal and gangster-like tactics."

"Silence!" The man on the professor's left struck. A thin trickle of blood ran down from the corner of the professor's mouth. He stood perfectly still, his head held high.

The white-haired man at the table spoke. His voice was suave and oily. "The charge against you is a grave one, Professor Morrison. As a result of your subversive activities our college students have rioted in the streets today. Two of them were seriously injured. One of them may not live. This unhappy situation is traceable directly to your door, Professor."

"The sacrifice of life may be necessary to expose you, Mr. Potter," said the professor. "This is a rather interesting situation. I'm afraid you are going to have to murder me in cold blood, because if I am allowed to leave

here alive, Mr. Potter, I shall take some pleasure in making public the fact that Central City's leading banker is a secret and illegal judge of the conduct of Free American citizens. It should cause quite a stir."

Jericho moved restlessly. "The fool," he muttered "The courageous damned fool!"

"The time has come in this country, Professor, when we can no longer count upon the courts to act swiftly enough in an emergency. As patriotic Americans we must take the law into our own hands. You are teaching our children to revere a corrupt and evil political philosophy. They bow down to Stalin, the Red. They are inciting citizens to resist their own government. This is treason, Morrison, and we intend to view it as such. You know the penalty for treason!"

"Will you pardon me if I apply a slang expression to that charge, Mr. Gerber?" asked the Professor "I say 'nuts' to it!"

Morrison was yanked around by one man and a fist smashed squarely into the muddle of his face. The other man spun him and kicked him savagely in the shins. The old man staggered and went down on his hands and knees. He was promptly yanked up again, and held erect, his chin sagging forward on his chest.

"The hell with him," said Jankowski, in a loud voice. "Everyone knows he has been ordered to leave town. If he disappears, no one will ask questions." He fingered the gun that was holstered on his thigh. "Why waste any more time?"

Gerber looked out over the green-shirted throng "Does anyone object to this course of action? This man is dangerous. He has a glib tongue, he has access to the public press and to cer-

tain dangerously vocal groups. If he quite simply and quietly disappears there will be a little talk but it will soon die down. We can pass the word around that after all, he did not have the courage of his convictions. Objections?"

There was a dead silence.

And then from the back of the room came a curiously quiet voice speaking a stilted English.

"I have objecting most extremely" said the voice.

Two hundred and seventy-five heads turned. Jankowski and Potter, the banker, jumped to their feet to stand beside Gerber on the platform.

The owner of the curious voice stood in a doorway at the back of the room. He was not much over five feet tall. He wore a dark rain coat, the collar turned up around his throat, and a dark felt hat, the brim turned down over his eyes. His face was completely hidden by a black mask. In his hands he held a Thompson sub-machine gun. And as the heads turned the gun began to spout flame. There was a great cascade of smashed glass as the chandelier was demolished and the room was plunged into instant darkness. And over the sound of the gun came Jericho's voice, raised jubilantly.

"Wu, you little sucker!"

Then a wild pandemonium of shots and yells. Jankowski bellowing for lights . . . a scream of pain . . . the clatter of overturned chairs.

At last torches appeared. The destruction of the chandelier had evidently thrown the whole electric system out of kilter for the entire house was black. Gerber was shouting for order. The torches were focussed on the platform where he stood with arm upraised. For a moment there was another silence. The two guards who had been holding Pro-

fessor Morrison lay on the floor. But Professor Morrison was no longer there.

Then the sound of a car motor springing to life, racing at top speed.

III

GEORGE JEROME, governor of the State, had been rousted out of bed. He looked a trifle bewildered as he faced the three men in his study. He wore a flannel bathrobe, and he was tumbling with a cigar that he couldn't seem to get burning properly.

"I have been in touch with National Headquarters," Gerber said. "There can be no doubt these men are the Park Avenue Hunt Club. They were in High-point only yesterday."

"How many of them are there?" the Governor asked.

"God knows," said Potter, the banker. He swabbed at the beads of sweat that dampened his forehead.

"There can't be more than half a dozen," said Jankowski, angrily. "The gatekeeper thought there were six people in the car that escaped. One of them may have been Professor Morrison."

"But I don't understand," said the Governor. "How did they get away?"

Jankowski shrugged. "Confusion. Our own men stumbling over each other in the dark. They snatched one of our cars, and when the gatekeeper tried to stop them they smashed through the gates. It ruined the car, but evidently they had another one waiting."

"But what do you want me to do?" asked Governor Jerome.

"We've got to get these men and get them quick," said Gerber. "And we've got to get Morrison back! The man is dynamite if he talks in the wrong places."

"But . . ."

"You've got to issue a statement, Governor. Something about 'outside racketeers.' Throw the blame of Morrison's disappearance on them. Order every law enforcement body in the State to be on the lookout for them—troopers, detectives, local police forces. We're already covering railroad stations, highways, and airports. I think we've got them bottled up in Central City. We've got to make certain there's no means of escape, and then we can systematically hunt them down."

The Governor pressed a button on his desk. "I'll issue orders at once."

"One more thing, Jerome," said Jankowski, grimly. "Get your daughter out of town. Send her to Europe . . . or some place. Keep her away from us. If it hadn't been for her we'd have had those two men this morning. I'll lay odds she's been helping them to-night, at least with information."

"But gentlemen . . ."

"If you don't get her out of here," said Jankowski, "I won't be responsible for her safety. We're not in a position to let anyone ball up the works for us, Jerome, not even your daughter."

"I'll attend to her," said the Governor.

"And remember," said Jankowski, "if any of your men catch up with these Hunt Club boys they're to shoot first and ask questions afterwards."

"I understand," said the Governor.

PETER HAZLITT, editor of Central City's evening paper, the *Globe*, listened to an extraordinary story, his eyes blazing with excitement. Teddy Jerome, the governor's daughter, stood beside him, her arm linked in his.

They were in the basement of Hazlitt's house in the city's residential district. The windows were carefully boarded up, and the basement room

had been made into a comfortable study. In the center of the room Professor Morrison sat in an arm chair, his head resting against the back of it. His face was pale, his lips swollen, but he was chuckling. He looked at the four men who stood in the shadow.

"If you could have seen Gerber's face, Peter," the professor said, "when Mr. Wu suddenly appeared and announced that he objected to my being murdered! There was just a flash, for Mr. Wu promptly shot out the lights. But I shall never forget it."

Wu spoke, his slanting eyes expressionless. "Necessity for greatest of self-control not to shooting Mr. Gerber instead of chandelier," he said. "Perhaps that pleasure is reserving for the future."

"It was a miracle," said Saville. "John and I had almost no chance of breaking up the situation. We were about to make a try at it when Wu appeared out of nowhere."

Arthur Hallam's eyes twinkled behind his steel-rimmed spectacles. "You've Miss Jerome to thank for our presence, Geoffrey. We hunted up Dr. Carver when we arrived and she was with him. We decided to go out to the Prentiss place and have a look ourselves. She drove us."

"The marines in person," Jericho laughed.

Peter Hazlitt spoke up eagerly. "Gentlemen, I'm going to have an extra on the streets in the morning. We'll run Professor Morrison's own story of his trial. My God! When the people of Central City read that and know that men like Harold Potter are no better than common murderers!"

"You'll be running risks if you print that story, Hazlitt," Saville said. "Unless I miss my guess they're turning this place upside down for us. The minute

that story appears they're going to know you have some information as to where we're luding."

"The hell with them," said Hazlitt. "They'll think twice before they start rubbing out members of the press."

"Peter . . . I . . . I think you should consider what Mr. Saville says." Teddy Jerome's voice was unsteady. "They're pretty desperate at the moment."

"I've got nothing to lose," said Hazlitt. "Unless these babies are beaten quickly the *Globe* is going under. We're losing advertisers in droves. I can't carry on much longer. We can at least go out with a burst of fireworks. Professor Morrison is the one I'm afraid for. If he tells his story . . ."

"Forget about it," said the professor, quietly. "Peter, if I kept still because I was afraid of the consequences I wouldn't want to live. These men are jeopardizing everything we hold dear in America. If we don't fight them with every weapon in our power, if we don't win, we will find ourselves ruled by the same type of gangsters who have turned Europe into a hell. What do any one of us as individuals matter? We're fighting for the very existence of democracy."

"Check," said Jericho.

"The *Globe* carries the story in a morning extra," said Peter Hazlitt.

CENTRAL CITY was, as Saville predicted, turned upside down during that night and early the next morning. Parties of green-shirted searchers swept over the town in waves. One squad searched the University to the boos and catcalls of students who were routed out of bed and questioned about Professor Morrison. Travelers at the railroad stations and airports were subjected to questioning and search. Certain citizens known to be out of sym-

pathy with the Green Shirts were put on the griddle, among them Dr. Carver

In the governor's mansion George Jerome, discovering that his daughter was not at home, sent out his own personal bodyguards to locate her. They went directly to Peter Hazlitt's home, and while they questioned the editor, the men for whom half of Central City was looking, listened in on the conversation from the basement room.

About four in the morning Hazlitt went to his office, having taken down in shorthand a complete account of his imprisonment and trial from Professor Morrison. A half dozen trusted employees arrived at the same time, the story was set up in type, and the extra was prepared for early morning delivery.

Just before seven the *Globe's* trucks began delivering to the news stands all over the city. By seven-thirty Gerber, at Green Shirt headquarters, had a copy of the paper in his hands. Fifteen minutes after that squads of Green Shirts in privately owned cars raced over the city, seizing unsold copies of the extra from the dealers. Newsboys, hawking copies on the corners, had the papers snatched from their hands by angry Minute Men.

At a quarter to eight two limousines, equipped with bullet proof glass, pulled

up outside the *Globe's* office. A dozen Green Shirts, headed by Jankowski, piled out and went into the building.

Peter Hazlitt was in his office, answering a stream of telephone calls that were already coming in. Jankowski wrenched open the door of the private office and stormed in, followed by four of his men. He grabbed the telephone cord and ripped it out by the roots.

"Okay, you double-crossing Red stool pigeon," he snarled at Hazlitt. "Start talking."

"I hadn't expected you quite so soon," said Peter Hazlitt.

"No? Well, listen! Hear anything?"

There were confused cries from the floor below, then the noise of someone smashing at machinery.

"The *Globe's* presses have turned for the last time," said Jankowski. "But we're only just beginning to work on you, Hazlitt. Where is Professor Morrison?"

"Safe," said Hazlitt, quietly.

"Stop stalling. I'll give you just thirty seconds to come clean about Morrison and the men who rescued him last night, and then, if you haven't talked, you'll wish you'd never been born."

"I'm just beginning to be glad about the whole thing," Hazlitt said. "Up to now I've never really had a cause to fight for, Jankowski. Now I've got one."

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Perhaps you're the one who's going to have regrets. You're done, Jankowski. The whole rotten mob of you. We're going to spread your names in every newspaper in the country. Surely you don't think breaking up my presses is going to stop this story?"

"Give it to him!" Jankowski ordered.

Hazlitt knew he didn't have a chance, but he started punching. The four Green Shirts were on him, swinging their black leather persuaders. One of them caught Hazlitt's ink well on the point of his jaw and folded like an accordion. Then Jankowski himself waded in, his fists protected by a set of brass knuckles. They gouged at Hazlitt's face . . . smashed at his teeth

Hazlitt went down, was yanked up again, flattened against the wall. Jankowski's fists raked him from side to side. Hazlitt limp as a sawdust dummy, finally sank to the floor and lay still.

The officer door opened. Two more Green Shirts came in. Held firmly between them was Teddy Jerome.

"Peter!" she cried. She tried to wrench herself free without success.

Jankowski laughed. "Nice going, boys," he said.

"She seen us come in," said one of the Green Shirts. "She started hollerm' for the law."

"We are the law, Miss Jerome!" Jankowski said. "Where is Professor Morrison?"

"I don't know. And if you've hurt Peter . . ."

"We've hurt him plenty. Maybe we can let him off easy now. Throw some water on the dirty —, Kelley. I've got a hunch our young editor will start talking fast when he sees who's here."

GROANING, Hazlitt was yanked up to his feet and plumped in his desk chair. After a moment or two he

opened his eyes, and looked into Teddy's white, frightened face.

"Oh, my God!" said Hazlitt, despairingly.

"Okay, Hazlitt, start talking and start talking quick . . . unless you'd like to watch your girl friend get a going over."

"No, Peter! No! You mustn't talk No matter what."

"Shut up, you!" One of the Green Shirts gave the girl's face a ringing slap.

Hazlitt surged forward out of his chair but he was slugged back into it.

"Where's Morrison?" Jankowski demanded. "Where's this Hunt Club outfit?"

"I . . . I . . ."

"Twist her damned arm off!" Jankowski ordered.

Teddy Jerome tried not to scream but the pain was too much.

Hazlitt was on his feet again. "I'll talk! I'll tell you where they are! For God sake let her alone!"

"Okay. Give!"

"Professor Morrison and the Hunt Club are in the basement of my house, in a study I have fixed up there."

"So you were hiding them, you —!"

Brass knuckles crushed into the middle of Hazlitt's face. The editor's blood spattered on the front of Jankowski's green shirt.

"Let's get moving, boys. Maybe the Professor and his friends are in for an unpleasant surprise."

He turned for the door and stopped dead. His men, too, seemed to freeze. The way out of Peter Hazlitt's private office was blocked. The door closed with a soft click, shutting out the sound of the sledge hammers that pounded at Hazlitt's presses. Standing with his back to the door was a man—a tall, red-headed man whose massive shoulders seemed to spread from one side of the

door to the other. He held an automatic in each hand. Those guns were not half so frightening as the expression on his face. It was the face of an angel of doom.

"Going somewhere, sweetheart?" Jericho asked, in a voice that was almost a whisper.

Jankowski sucked in his breath. "The Park Avenue Hunt Club, eh?"

"Something like that," said Jericho. "Line up against the wall, all of you. Backs turned. Hands over your head."

The men turned slowly. There was no doubting Jericho's intention if they disobeyed. "Teddy, search them. Take away guns and blackjacks. Put them on Hazlitt's desk."

The girl moved swiftly from one Green Shirt to the next, and piled the accumulation of blackjacks and automatics on the blood spattered blotter.

"Now," said Jericho, "take these guns of mine and keep them covered. If anyone moves without orders from me, let 'em have it."

The girl nodded, took the guns, and leveled them steadily at the five Green Shirts.

"Turn around," Jericho ordered. He pointed to the man on the end of the line. "You! Come out here and take it."

The man moistened his lips, took a step or two toward the center of the room.

"What's the matter with you?" Jericho demanded. "Are you afraid without five or ten pals to back you up? You're so damned tough! Put up your hands and start fighting."

The Green Shirt suddenly lowered his head and rushed. It was not sound tactics. Jericho sidestepped his right fist ripped up. The man stopped as if he'd been shot, swayed, pitched forward on his face.

"Next," said Jericho, and there was a note of unholy joy in his voice.

Jankowski leaned against the wall and watched, his eyes narrowed, his hairy hands clutching and unclenching. A faint smile twitched at the corners of his lips. He watched Jericho bowl over his men like nine pins. There was at last, a dead silence as Jankowski and Jericho faced each other.

"And now, Jankowski, you! Only this isn't going to be a boxing lesson. There's a boy in the hospital with a fractured spine. He'll probably die. There are a dozen other crimes of that type on the record against you. One of us is not leaving this room." He turned to Teddy. "Get Hazlitt out of here and stay out."

Jankowski's eyes turned swiftly toward the desk top.

Jericho laughed. "You'll have your chance at those, sweetheart, such as it is. If you get to use one you can consider this your lucky day."

GOVERNOR JEROME spoke earnestly into the telephone on his desk. "Any news, Gerber?"

"Nothing concrete," said the Green Shirt leader, speaking from his headquarters at the Prentiss place. "We've gotten that extra of Hazlitt's off the street, but I'm afraid a good many of them were sold. We've gone through the town with a fine tooth comb, but we haven't located the Hunt Club."

"What are you going to do next?"

"We're going to keep hunting!" said Gerber savagely. "We're going to find them. Every highway in the state is covered, every . . ." Gerber trailed off.

"Gerber!" The governor cried. "Gerber!"

Then a suave, cool voice came over the wire, "Governor Jerome?"

"Yes. Who is this?"

"I am speaking for the Park Avenue Hunt Club Governor. If your resignation isn't in the hands of the State Senate in one hour's time we are coming to get you."

"You can't bully me. Where's Gerber?" Jerome blustered.

"Gerber and the rest of your friends are about to stand trial for treason," said Saville, calmly. "On your daughter's account we are giving you the chance to step out of your own volition. If you fail to do so, the result will not be to your liking."

"Look here, whoever you are. You can't."

The door of the governor's office was unceremoniously thrown open. A trembling, white-faced secretary hurried across the room.

"Governor!"

"What is it?"

The secretary pointed with a shaking hand toward the office window. Jerome put down the phone and went to the window. A crowd was beginning to gather at the foot of the Capitol steps. They were interested in a crumpled green figure which lay in a grotesque heap on the sidewalk.

"Who is it?" Jerome asked.

"Jankowski," the secretary whispered.

A policeman detached himself from the crowd and came running up the steps to the building. A moment later he entered the governor's office.

"Dead?" Jerome asked, hoarsely.

The policeman nodded. "Took a terrible beating from someone, sir. And this was pinned to his shirt. He handed the governor a slip of paper. There was a message printed on it."

A GOING AWAY PR SENT FOR
GOVERNOR JEROME
From
THE PARK AVENUE HUNT CLUB

IV

THERE was just one place in Central City where the army of Green Shirts had not looked for the Park Avenue Hunt Club. That was at their own headquarters, the Prentiss place on the outskirts of town.

Arthur Hallam, whose chess-playing brain had devised a thousand campaigns for the Hunt Club, had conceived of this strategy. In the early hours of the morning, before Peter Hazlitt's extra hit the streets, Saville, Hallam and Wu concealed themselves in the woods opposite the Prentiss place. Jericho had remained in the city for the purpose of guarding Professor Morrison who was too badly shaken up to take a hand in the attack.

Shortly after seven, when Saville and his friends knew the extra must be out, car loads of Green Shirts began tumbling out of the Prentiss place at break-neck speed. Shortly after that, armed with a wire cutter and insulated gloves, Saville mounted the stone wall at some distance from the gate and clipped the electrically charged wire. Between them he and Wu managed to hoist Hallam over the wall, and all three were in the grounds.

There was one brief flurry. A sentry, walking his beat, spotted them as they dodged amongst the shrubbery on the lawn. The man raised his gun to fire, but Wu, swift and silent, made a gesture with his right arm. Steel glittered in the early morning sunlight . . . and the sentry went down, clutching at the handle of a knife which had buried itself in his shoulder. A moment later he lay trussed like a chicken under the thick foliage of a rhododendron bush.

It was less than an hour after that when cars began to arrive. There were no Green Shirts in them. They were

loaded down with boys and girls from the University. There was a new gate-keeper at the Prentiss place, a short little man with the slanting eyes of a Chinese. The students piled out of their cars and were admitted, and the cars driven away. They disappeared into the house. Shortly before ten o'clock the ball room of the old Prentiss place was filled with silent, grim-faced youngsters . . . waiting

About then Green Shirts began to straggle in. As each car load arrived, lightning struck. They were hustled out of their cars at the point of sub-machine guns in the hands of two masked men. They were hustled down into the old wine cellars, disarmed, and locked in.

When Jan Gerber himself returned with his bodyguards he was unmolested until he got into his private office. He called the Governor to report on the morning's events, and felt the cold steel barrel of a gun pressed against the back of his neck.

BEHIND the flat-topped table in the ballroom of the Prentiss place sat three masked men. One of them, tall and broad-shouldered, had a badly cut mouth and his clothing was torn and soiled. But his eyes gleamed brilliantly through the slits of his mask.

A door at the end of the room opened and Jan Gerber and Harold Potter came in, their hands bound behind their backs. A small Chinese, gun in hand, walked behind them. They were brought down to a place in front of the raised desk, the place where Professor Morrison had stood the night before.

Geoffery Saville stood up. His voice was stern, judicial.

"Jan Gerber and Harold Potter, you are here to face charges of treason. You are to be given the same chance that you would be given in a court of law . . .

perhaps a better chance. Your jury is to consist of these several hundred students. We had meant to have your friend Jankowski stand trial with you. Unfortunately that is not possible."

Gerber smiled, arrogantly. "Perhaps you had better hurry with your play-acting, Mr. Hunt Club. When Jankowski returns this farce will come to an abrupt end."

"Jankowski will not return," said Saville, gravely. "He is dead. About a hundred of your men are locked in the wine cellars of this house. They will be left there for the Federal detectives who have a keen interest in the possessors of arms, ammunition, guns, hand grenades and the like."

"You can't do this!" Potter said. "We have a right to trial. We have a right to lawyers . . . to the due process of the courts."

"You were not prepared to grant Professor Morrison those rights last night," said Saville. "You are guilty of murder. You are guilty of attempting to seize control of the governments of your State and your Nation. Have you anything to say for yourselves?"

"We are not guilty," said Gerber. "We stand for Democracy and freedom. We are fighting subversive influences that are attempting to bore from within. Everyone knows the purpose of the Liberty Crusaders."

"Yes, Gerber. Everyone knows their purposes."

"We're wasting time," said Jericho, impatiently.

Saville nodded. "We stand ready to pass judgment on you, Gerber and Potter. Out of your funds you will provide the money to repair the damage that was inflicted on the office of the *Globe* this morning. You will pay all bills in connection with the medical care and treatment of the students who

were injured in the riot yesterday, of Peter Hazitt, and of Professor Morrisson.

"From here, my friends, you will be escorted to the city jail by the members of this court. There will be no bail, gentlemen, because you will be charged with first degree murder. Every member of the Green Shirt organization in this city will be indicted on similar charges as accessories. You will stand trial in an American court of law, Gerber. You will not be tried by any of the local judges or by the local prosecutor, because they will be co-defendants with you.

"If any of you are lucky enough to escape the judgment of the court, then this court will re-convene. If, through legal trickery, you fail to be dealt with under the law, then this body will deal with you *outside* the law."

Saville turned and faced the gathering of students. "Does the judgment meet with your approval?"

There was a full-throated roar.

"In that case I suggest that you

stage one more parade . . . a parade to the city jail with these men as your prisoners."

IN AN office building overlooking the lake in Chicago a man sat alone, reading the early afternoon editions of the papers. He was a gray man, tall, slender. His hair was gray, his eyes were gray, he wore a gray flannel suit. One lens of his silver-rimmed spectacles was frosted, so that it completely concealed one eye.

He stared grimly at the headlines.

GREEN SHIRTS IN CENTRAL CITY WIPE OUT BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Rumored Park Avenue Hunt Club
Played Part in Forcible Arrests

Leader of Flying Squad Killed in Struggle

The thin gray man suddenly crumpled the paper in his tapering fingers, his face twisted by a spasm of rage.

"They have got to be stopped!" he said, softly. "At any cost!"

Coming Soon

A SIMPLE CASE OF MURDER

By Philip Ketchum

USE **SPEEDWAY** DE LUXE BLADES

FOR FAST, SMOOTH, ECONOMICAL SHAVES

4 FOR 10¢

The glint in Marie's
eyes chilled her heart



*Judy was bored—her kiss in the moonlight seemed
harmless until her husband went for his gun*

The Caretaker's Wife

By Preston Grady

SHERRIFF LEM CONNOR of Co-
hatchie, South Carolina—which
isn't the name of the town, but
might well be, since it sounds like the
names of lots of towns in that neck of
the woods—is undoubtedly the laziest
white man between Raleigh and Savan-
nah. As a detective, he is a horrible
example. For instance, he scorns the
deductive school of thought, which
maintains that a sleuth, by interviewing
the suspects and picking flaws in their
stories and cleverly interpreting clues,

should be able to point the accusing
finger immediately thereafter. Likewise
he shrugs off the school of action,
in which hard-boiled shamuses rush
around threatening people with guns
and getting beaten over the head before
cornering the villain just as that sinister
individual is about to cut off the hero-
ine's hands, or something.

Lem says he solves crimes by just
sitting still and using horse sense. And
I'll have to admit that in this case his
theory worked out, though he was the

only one who did much sitting still I nearly went crazy with excitement before the pay-off. I was running the weekly newspaper down there then, and somehow got on the good side of Lem, which is how I probably know more about it than anybody except him

He wouldn't like the way I'll have to tell this. He says I always was a romantic damned fool and always will be, that I've got too much imagination and sympathy for folks who don't deserve it, and that I'll never even make a good newspaperman because I have a tendency to throw in things that probably didn't happen in any given affair, just because I like to think they did happen. Maybe it's true. And I'm certainly going to use my imagination on the few points I'm not so sure about in this case, and if that's being a romantic fool, okay; at least nobody can prove me wrong, and the main points speak for themselves, being matters of record in Lem's office. But the background is what I think is important, so I'm going to start on a certain evening with a girl named Judy Gibson, who was beginning to feel neglected, even though she was married to as nice a young fellow as any of us ever knew in Cohatch.e.

SHE looked at the clock for the dozenth time, and it was nine-thirty-two hours at least before her husband would be home. The radio only grated on her nerves; she snapped it off, stood up and clutched her bare arms against her. She found the lace shawl which had been her grandmother's, flung it about her shoulders and went out of the cottage.

She walked slowly down the lane toward the south pasture. The night was bright with stars. From the veranda of the big house several hundred yards distant she heard gay laughter, and some-

one turned up the radio there, probably for dancing. It was the same program she'd had, but it sounded different. She wouldn't let herself look that way.

At the rail fence which Jonathan Hargrave had restored rather than replaced (the phrase he used in connection with any change about the plantation) she paused and drew a deep breath. The pasture stretched out before her in the moonlight to meet the ranks of stately live-oaks beared with Spanish moss. Sometimes the wild beauty of this low country frightened her, and again it filled her with a longing she couldn't identify. Tonight, she told herself, she was not frightened.

"Hello."

She whirled, the back of her hand flying up to her lips. "Oh," she said. "You."

He chuckled pleasantly. "Sorry if I startled you. Cigarette?"

"Thanks."

She took one and he lifted the flame of his lighter, peering into her eyes. "You're the caretaker's wife, aren't you?" he said. "Judy Gibson."

She nodded, watched the play of light on his handsome, aquiline features as he took a quick puff. "And you're Jeffrey Hargrave."

"We seem to know each other," he said, and they smiled together. "Could I help you reach for the moon? Or were you planning to do that?"

For a long moment she did not answer. Then: "I suppose so," she said very seriously. "What's the matter—bored with your party?"

"Let's not talk about it."

When they walked back up the lane toward the cottage some time later her shoulder was touching his arm. A tingle of guilt ran through her as she realized that her eyes were searching out the space beneath the big magnolia tree at

the side of the house where her husband, Mark, usually parked; the station wagon was not yet there.

They turned into the gap in the box wood before the cottage. Near the door she stopped. "Good night, Jeffrey."

He kissed her. She did not struggle. He released her and she ran lightly up the steps, across the porch and into the house, closing the door swiftly behind her. She leaned back against the door, one hand still on the knob, waiting to still the pounding of her heart.

It was nearly midnight when Mark came home. She put down the magazine through which she had been leafing, only half seeing the pages, and rose to greet him.

In his blunt, capable way he caught her under the arms and lifted her, gave her a blithe peck on the cheek and set her down. But she could see he was tired. His shoulders sagged.

"Two more customers today, honey," he said. "Both of 'em to stay two weeks. We're out of the red! The Wardmalaw Gun Club has got a spreading reputation. In another season we'll be able to chuck this job and move to that place near the river."

"That's swell, Mark," she said. "But do you have to drive over to the club every night?"

"Just for a few weeks longer. It's the personal touch, and I have to be sure my guests get good hunting. You know how Charlie is—he's liable to go off on a spree and then what would the customers do? I can't ever let 'em feel for a minute that they're being neglected."

Not the customers—oh, no, thought Judy—but what about your wife? She got into bed while he was brushing his teeth and when he joined her he said, "Been lonely, kid?"

"Yes . . . a little." In a little while she said, "Mark?"

He did not answer; his breathing became deeper, more regular.

SHE lay listening to the music which still came from the big house. She wanted to be a good wife. It wasn't her fault he was so fired with ambition that he had no time for anything but work. She was only twenty-one, she should be having fun. Not, necessarily, the kind of fun those people in the big house indulged in, the women scheming how to capture one another's men and the men scheming how to marry more money or outsmart some competitor. She'd seen enough of that. But they did have, some of them, romance—the thrill of the chase, the pride of conquest. Surely they must have that. And she was attractive. She knew that without being more than normally vain about it.

She thought about Jeffrey Hargrave, who played six-goal polo and had his pick of the debutantes. Old Jonathan, his father, even when here, spent most of his time in the offices in the east wing of the manor house, with teletypes and direct-line phones and hovering secretaries keeping him in as close touch with his affairs as if he were in Wall Street. Old Jonathan was a self-made man and he wasn't finished yet. But Jeffrey made up for what his father didn't do and then some. Rumor had it that on several occasions the old pirate had threatened to disown Jeff. They were constantly bickering. Jeffrey the playboy, the woman chaser. But what of it? If Jeffrey was playing with her, Judy reflected, she didn't mind. He was only a game with her, too.

When she awoke Mark was half dressed and with a guilty start she hurried to catch up with him and see that Mandy prepared breakfast just right. She had no time to reflect in leisure upon her evening, so that when it came

to her mind at all, the whole business seemed ch.lc.sh

Mark's cheerfulness about prospects for his club had increased overnight, and she shared his good humor. At last he had his hands on something he liked and for which he felt he was fitted. Mark had been an all-Southern tackle and sort of a campus hero. She'd left college in her sophomore year to marry him.

Jobs were scarce then and Mark had thought himself lucky to land a berth as coach at a prep school. But he wasn't happy there, and when an old friend of his father's who knew Jonathan Hargrave had suggested that Hargrave needed someone to look after this huge estate, Mark had sought the job eagerly, and he'd handled it well. Men liked him, particularly the kind of men who came here for the hunting and fishing, and now Mark held a lease on a big tract for himself. In another year or two, he hoped, he would no longer be just a caretaker but the operator of the most expensive and exclusive hunt club in the Southeast. And Judy was glad for him and with him.

She made herself busy with manufactured tasks. Maybe she was like some women in the South in being too blessed with cheap help. The time still dragged. She saw Mark only at meals. Throughout the day he was attending to his far-flung duties as overseer here, and in the evenings he went to check up on Charlie Knowles, who was acting as manager of the club for him.

A few days later Mark said: "You must get pretty lonely around here, kid. Why don't you go riding with the guests sometimes? Jeffrey Hargrave was hunting the other day that there are too few women on the place and that if I didn't mind"—Mark chuckled at the absurdity—"he wished you'd join in things more. Why not?"

She went riding several mornings and met a succession of brittle women—they came and went, at the Hargraves'—who prattled about things in which she wasn't interested, meanwhile alertly appraising her and occasionally descending to ask questions about her husband; and an array of males, most of them too young or too old, some of whom furtively tried to date her up. She did not like any of them and she was glad when she found herself riding alone with Jeffrey along a woods road one crisp morning.

"You're a very lovely creature, Judy," he said as they drew up to let their horses drink from a stream. "Why have you been avoiding me since the other night?"

"I haven't, really."

"But you still spend your evenings alone?" He put a hand on hers. "Must you? Let me drop in now and then, when—that is."

She saw what he meant and she changed the subject, capriciously perverse. But before they parted she said, "When my husband is home, his car is parked under the magnolia tree beside the house. The large magnolia, you know—its lower limbs have been cut off."

He came to the cottage nearly every evening after that, being careful to leave at least half an hour before Mark would be likely to return from his nightly visit to the club. Judy would make drinks, or they would take a walk, and she was thrilled. They tried to avoid being seen by the servants; vainly, as it turned out.

One night they strolled farther than usual. It was past eleven when they returned. Near the cottage she said, "Better go now, Jeffrey. He—he may be driving in any minute."

His kiss was prolonged. He had released her when they heard footsteps

and Mark came into view, so close that her heart rose in her throat

"Hello there, you two," Mark said easily. "Out for a walk? I'm glad to see you have company, Judy."

She was praying that the pale autumn moon would not reveal the terror on her face, and she desperately tried to make her voice steady

"Mark! I didn't hear you drive in. I was up to the library to return a book and Jeffrey was kind enough to walk back with me. But where's your car?"

'Had a blowout when I was running about fifty and bent an axle against a stump beside the road. Good thing I wasn't far from the club. Charlie drove me back, let me out at the main gate.' He shrugged his sturdy shoulders, smiled amably. "Come in for a drink, Jeffrey. How's your father these days?"

"Oh, Father's the same, you know. Ought to get out more. . . About the drink—guess I'd better not, it's getting late. But thanks." Jeffrey paused, then started to turn away.

Mark said quickly, "Run on in the house, Judy. I'll see you in a few minutes. Think I'll walk back with Jeffrey. There are some things I want to talk over with him."

SHE sat trembling in the living room of the cottage waiting for her husband, and after an eternity she heard him approach, whistling a popular tune. It was nightmarish, incredible. She steeled herself to what she hoped was seeming casualness. She was rearranging things on a bookshelf when he walked in.

"Glad you had Jeffrey with you, honey," he told her. "He and I had a chat . . . and I'm taking tomorrow off from the plantation. He's fed up with his crowd . . . had another argument

with his dad . . . and he's interested in my club, wants to get away for a day. So we're going to join the deer hunt Charlie's staging. Say, is my twelve gauge pump gun in the closet? Hope I've got enough buckshot loads."

He found the gun and inspected it carefully, glanced at her over his shoulder. There was a peculiar gleam in his eyes.

"You look tired, Judy. Why don't you go to bed? I'll be there in a minute . . . got to get a *little* sleep. We're leaving early. About five o'clock, if Jeffrey makes it."

Her vocal chords were paralyzed. She turned stiffly from the bookshelf and went to the bedroom. She undressed and got into bed.

Presently he came in, went into the bathroom, came out tying his pajama belt and yawning, slid in beneath the covers, turned on his side and in five minutes seemed to be fast asleep. He never used an alarm clock, he could wake up at any time on which he set his mind.

She heard the clock in the living room strike every half hour from twelve-thirty to three. She was bathed in cold sweat. But he was only going on a deer hunt, she kept telling herself. It was only natural that he should invite Jeffrey.

She awoke to daylight and Mark was gone.

AT NOON that day Mark Gibson telephoned his wife from the Wardmalaw Gun Club. I don't have to use my imagination on this part too much, if the memory of Agatha Robinson can be depended upon, and if she isn't too competent at gossiping, from which the saints preserve her. Agatha is a cousin of Sheriff Lem Connor's. Nobody objects to nepotism around Cohatchie; it

seems to work out well enough here.

"Hello, hello. That you, Judy?" said Mark.

"Ye-es."

"You don't sound like yourself," he said. "We must have a bad connection. These damn country phones. (Agatha would always sniff when she quoted the insult to the system which was her pride and joy) Listen, Judy," he went on, "I'm at the club. There's been an accident. Pretty bad. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, Mark. What—"

"Jeffrey Hargrave's been shot. On the deer hunt this morning."

"Who shot him? Who shot him? You—"

"I mistook him for a deer in the underbrush. He was off his post. He's dead. . . . Hello, hello! Do you understand, Judy?"

She screamed over the wire. "You killed him! You murdered him in cold blood! You shot him because you're insanely jealous because I—" She stopped suddenly.

"Judy!" Mark jiggled the hook, looked behind him at the solemn-faced men in the lounge of the gun club, and his brow wrinkled. "Hello, operator? This is Mark Gibson. I was talking with my wife at the Hargrave place, you know. . . . Yes. . . . Hello, Mandy?"

"Yessuh. Mist' Gibson."

"What's the matter with my wife? I was talking with her and—"

"She done fainted, Mist' Gibson. She heah on the floor."

"Oh. Well, look after her. Mr. Jeffrey Hargrave has been shot, Mandy. Yes, killed accidentally on a deer hunt. . . . No, don't worry about reporting it to the big house. There's no need for that. Look after my wife."

Mark hung up and stood motionless for a minute in abstracted indecision.

Muscles rippled along the line of his jaw.

"She take it pretty hard, Mark?" asked Charlie Knowles.

"Yes, must have been quite a shock," said Mark. He turned the crank, asked Agatha to get him Sheriff Lem Connor at Cohatchie, the county seat.

"Hello, Lem? Mark Gibson. I want to report an accidental shooting. Young Jeffrey Hargrave—he's dead. I shot him in the brush this morning, thinking he was a deer."

"Well, now, that's too bad, Mark," said Lem. "I sure am sorry to hear about it, for more reasons than one. H'mm. Dang these Yankees, they spend a lot of money around here but they're always gettin' into messes. So you shot him, huh?"

"Yes, I thought he was a deer. Just a movement of, something big in the bushes, you know."

"Any witnesses?"

Mark hesitated until the sheriff repeated, "I said, any witnesses, Mark?"

"No. No witnesses, Lem."

"You get any deer?"

"What?"

"I said, you get any deer?"

Mark wondered what that had to do with it, from his end, and later I was to do a lot of wondering about it from Lem's end, because I was sitting in his office while this conversation was going on. But Mark answered.

"Yes, there were six killed, in all. I got two of them."

"Before you shot young Hargrave by mistake, huh?"

"Yes."

"The deer been butchered yet, Mark?"

"I—I don't know. I'll ask and see." He turned around and asked Charlie Knowles whether the darkies on the place had butchered the venison yet, and

Charlie had to go outside to see, so that it was a few minutes before Mark said into the phone, "No . . . not butchered yet. Why in thunder do you want to know that?"

"Well, I'd kinda like to know the evidence ain't been' destroyed. They all got good horns, have they?"

"Sure." Mark must have thought Lem crazy by this time. I know I did, from what I was able to gather from Lem's side of the conversation. "About Jeffrey Hargrave, Lem—you want me to drive over and make a report?" asked Mark.

"Well, I reckon you'd better, now"

"All right I'll drive over right away."

Charlie Knowles rode with Mark Gibson to Cohatchie. Charlie talked ramblingly and continuously, but Mark spoke only once during the trip.

"When we get there, keep your mouth shut, Charlie," he said, tight-lipped. "Let me do the talking. Let me handle it all the way through."

Charlie's seamed face became perplexed. He squinted wonderingly at Mark, whose eyes were steady on the road. Then, openly nettled, he grunted and took a fresh bite off his tobacco plug, tongued it into place in his jaw.

"All right, Mark," he said. "You're the doctor."

JUDY squirmed away from the cold damp cloth with which Mandy was stroking her forehead, and sat up dazedly.

"Is you all right now, Miz Judy? My lawsy, why you takin' on so 'bout one o' them no-good city trash gettin' shot? Won't be no loss to nobody. Won't be no—" Her fat, round black face became startled. "Where you goin', Miz Judy?"

Hatless and coatless, Judy ran out of

the house to the shed in the back yard under which her coupé was parked. The keys were in the ignition. She backed into the main driveway, in her hurry cutting one wheel over an azalea bed and swerved the car out past the hoary columns of live-oaks and through the opened wrought iron gates, the main entrance of the plantation.

She was panic-stricken. All morning she had been trying desperately to persuade herself that Mark merely had had a whim to take a day off, perhaps during his conversation with Jeffrey the evening before, and so had invited Jeffrey to join the hunt and at the same time look over the prospering club which was the key to Mark's future. It could have been that. But now she knew it wasn't.

Mark's cold acceptance of the situation last night, his obvious and implacable intention to kill Jeffrey in a way that would result in a minimum scandal, and yet satisfy in his mind the demands of the unwritten law, now loomed more terrifying to her than an angry scene would have been. How much better if the two men had fought with their fists, there on the spot! How much better if Mark had taken her home and given her a thrashing! She was a witless, scatter-brained little fool and she had let her flirtatious instincts ruin her life.

If he hadn't seen her in Jeffrey's arms, if he hadn't heard her warning to Jeffrey about leaving before her husband returned, still there had been enough in the scene for him to suspect the worst. Her face must have made her guilt plain. And then when he had walked back to the main house with Jeffrey, talking to draw out the state of Jeffrey's emotions, he probably had been further convinced. And Jeffrey must have realized when Mark suggested the deer hunt, what Mark intended to do. But Jeffrey must have

had a code of his own, a code that led him gallantly to accept the inevitable and keep a rendezvous with death. The idiocy of men! Mark had become a murderer to satisfy his honor over something that never really had happened.

When she reached the clubhouse grounds she braked to a skidding stop and leaped from the car, running toward the door. A heavy set man came striding out purposefully and she had almost passed him before she recognized his forbidding, beetle-browed visage.

He said, "Are you looking for your husband, Mrs. Gibson?"

She paused, breathing deeply. "Yes, Mr. Hargrave. Is he in the clubhouse?"

"He's gone to Cohatchie—to the sheriff's office," said old Jonathan Hargrave, tearing her apart with his eyes.

SHERIFF LEM CONNOR leaned back in his swivel chair and rubbed his bristly chin and looked distressed. "Wasn't drinkin' this mornin', was you?"

"No," said Mark. "I can't explain it beyond the fact that every member of the party had been assigned to a post and given strict warning about remaining there. Charlie made the point stronger than usual" and here Charlie nodded "because there were several in the crowd who hadn't hunted deer in this section and weren't familiar with the precautions we have to take. Well, I saw this object moving in the brush, the hounds were baying close on scent, and from the shouts of the drivers I had every reason to believe the deer were coming through."

The phone rang. The sheriff answered and glowered accusingly at me. I was the only other person present in Lem's office at the moment.

"Some New York paper, Sam," he said. "Bet you called 'em, huh?"

"Well," I said, "I thought as long as Mr. Gibson was willing to talk . . ." I took the phone. "Yes, sir," I said brightly, for this was my first contact with metropolitan newspaperdom. "I arranged it so you could talk with him personally, if he doesn't mind, that is." I put my hand over the mouthpiece. "Lem," I said, "this means a lot to me. An appointment as correspondent for this section and a by-line for the front page . . ."

"It's up to Mark Gibson, Sam. You want to talk to the man, Mark? You don't have to. But Sam Scales is a pretty good guy and if you want to do him a favor you can go ahead."

Mark shrugged and took the phone. Anything the New York papers might say about it now would be mild compared to what they might say later, if things went against him. He explained patiently to a rewrite man that deer weren't hunted with rifles in the Carolinas because the country was too flat and thick with growth, that a rifle bullet might kill a man in the next county, and that the usual procedure was to station hunters around a track, far enough apart so buckshot loads would not be dangerous to those on neighboring posts; and that drivers on horseback or on foot took dogs into the selected area to scarce the deer out past the gunners, that deer were so plentiful the farmers had to put scarecrows with certain chemicals on them in the fields to keep the deer from eating up the crops, and that consequently there was an open season on them in this state from August 15 to December 15, all except does, at least.

At this point I lost my respect for metropolitan newspaperdom, realizing that the rewrite man to whom Mark was talking was probably a Harvard Phi Beta Kappa who knew everything

in the world there was to know except the barest smattering on how deer were usually hunted in the Carolinas, which was all he needed to know at the moment.

"So young Hargrave was off his post, against instructions, and you fired into the undergrowth near you and killed him?" the rewrite man asked.

"Yes" said Mark.

"Okay. Thanks, Mr. Gibson. Let me have Scales again, will you?"

The sheriff gazed absently out the window, stuffing and lighting his pipe, until I got through talking on the phone with New York, then he turned and remarked rather abruptly to Mark:

"This Jeffrey Hargrave kinda fancied himself with the womenfolks, I've heard. Now there's some old maids around here as might think maybe we ought to look for the woman in the case, as the detective stories say. Sure is a pity there wasn't no witness to this shootin'."

Mark probably remembered that the rural telephone operator was a cousin of the sheriff's, but he said nothing.

Charlie Knowles, who had been keeping his mouth clamped shut on his wad of tobacco with visible effort, began "For God's sake, Mark, why don't you—" But he subsided when Mark glared at him.

"What was that, Charlie?" asked the sheriff, sensing the tension between the two.

"Well, nothin' much," gulped Charlie. "I just had an idea but I guess it wasn't no good."

And I was thinking "All right, Lem . . . here's one case you won't solve by just sittin' and using horse sense. You've got something really hot on your hands now and you don't know what to do about it." But of course I didn't say anything like that.

THE sheriff was looking out the window again "Looks like we might have a couple more folks around here with ideas," he remarked. "There's two cars down there just drove up. Old Jonathan Hargrave in one . . . and your wife in the other, Mark."

And suddenly Mark abandoned all pretense of calmness. He got to his feet, his fists clenched into white knots and stark misery in the twisted line of his lips.

"Listen to me, Lem," he said hoarsely. "I don't mind trusting you and I guess I've got to—but before they come in will you clear the room?"

"Why, sure, son. I was intendin' to, anyhow. Hey, Sam . . . you go take a walk. You too, Charlie. Wait a minute, though. Maybe you better see that Mr Hargrave and Mark's wife come right up, Sam," he said to me, "and then sort of stand guard down at the end of the hall, huh?"

Charlie and I went out. The sheriff told him then "Don't take it so hard, son. I didn't let too much of the cat out of the bag. Sam won't dare print nothin' unless I tell him to, anyway." He coughed, rubbed his chin again. "I don't want to break up no homes. I'll even do better'n what I said. You love your wife and you want to talk with her alone, first, don't you?"

Mark nodded numbly "But I don't see why."

"It's all right. I oughtn't to've let you go on that way. Still don't know exactly why you played it like you did. Guess you wanted to see what she'd do."

And when Mark stared. "Yeah, I know how everything happened. I been stringin' you along, outa plain cussed curiosity about you. Hope you don't hold it against me."

The sheriff left. Mark was alone in

the room, and then I sent Judy in at Lem's order and closed the door. She went near him as if she wanted to touch him.

"I've been such a fool, darling," she said. "It's all my fault. About Jeffrey—there was nothing between us, really, but it's too late for that to matter now. What can I do?" Her eyes were brimming with tears. "Why did you—Oh, Mark, can you ever forgive me? What are they going to do to you?"

A light broke on his face. Now that he had heard the confession, it was no longer tragic to him. The horror that had benumbed his thinking for the past hour was banished. She hadn't been guilty of faithlessness; she had been guilty only of indiscretion, of exaggerating the importance of a fascination. And he had been guilty too . . . of neglect.

"Everything's all right, darling. I didn't know about you and Jeffrey until you blurted out that accusation on the phone today. You see, when Jeffrey went in the house last night, old Jonathan jumped him about his useless life. Jeffrey promised to settle down and they had a reconciliation. He mentioned the hunting trip and persuaded the old man to come along with us."

"You mean Jonathan was with you . . . when—"

"I didn't shoot Jeffrey. It was his father who made the mistake. He was so broken up about it—well, we three were on adjoining posts, and to keep the newspapers from making too much of it—their quarrels were pretty well known—and to protect the old man's feelings as much as I could, I took the blame."

After a moment he asked, "What the devil are you laughing about, Judy?"

"Oh, darling, I'm so happy I could shout!" She knew everything was going

to be fine from then on. With Mark she'd possessed the most beautiful thing in the world and she'd been foolish enough to treat it lightly. Now it had been given back to her and she felt that she was no longer a girl but a woman, a wife. She would never again gamble a flirtation against happiness.

WELL, that's the romantic fool part of it, which Lem wouldn't like and wouldn't admit it if he did. He would say I exaggerated everything but I don't think so, and here's the pay-off:

I was pretty mad for a while, the way things had been happening under my nose and not knowing what it was all about, so I said to the sheriff, "All right, I'll admit you just sat still and used horse sense. But what gave you the brainstorm in the first place?"

And he said, "Course Mark hadn't been around these parts but a couple years, and I hadn't come to know him as well as I'd've liked to, and I hadn't done any huntin' with him, either. But from all I heard about him I didn't figger he was the kind of man to go shootin' at somethin' in the woods without bein' purty sure what he was shootin' at, which is the first rule of bein' a good hunter. And so far as I knew, old Jonathan was the only one who hadn't done enough huntin' to be so raw a hand as to make a mistake like that, him bein' so busy makin' more money all the time."

"But why did you ask Mark all those questions about the deer they got before the accident?"

Lem stuffed his pipe carefully. "When a party like that goes in the woods, the men usually size each other up and decide whether they're gonna be lawful and shoot just bucks, or whether they're goin' out for meat and shoot does to. If they was shootin' does,

they'd butcher 'em in the woods, so the meat could stand better inspection by any warden that happened along. And they wouldn't be so finicky about seein' antlers before blastin' away at any big animal that come bustin' through the brush. But what Mark said on the phone sorta proved they was really shootin' only bucks, so I was sure a good hunter like Mark woulda got a good look at any animal's head before shootin'.

He put his feet on the window sill and lit his pipe and stared thoughtfully through clouds of foul smoke at the

bowl. "That really wasn't what tipped me off, though," he said, like a master mind.

"Well, what did?" I asked.

"I guess old Jonathan, bein' rattled agreed to let Mark take the blame at first. But when he heard there'd been gossip about the girl and Jeffrey, he saw what that might lead to, and right after Mark phoned he called up too and told me the truth about it. I guess you musta been out at the telegraph office about that time."

Now I ask you, was that horse sense? I'd call it coon luck.

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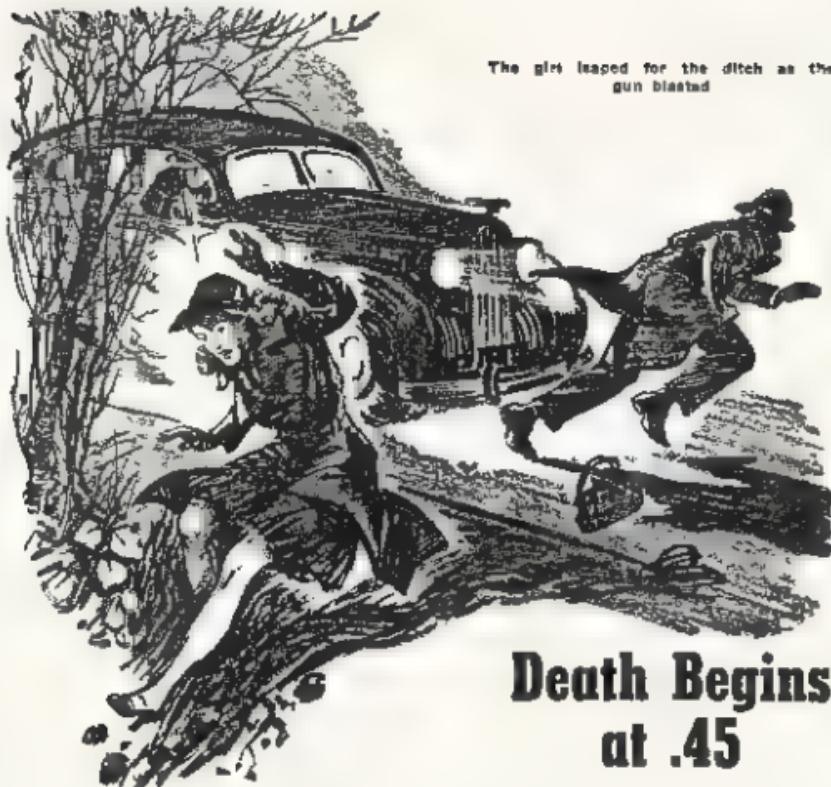
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The girl leaped for the ditch as the gun blasted

Death Begins at .45

By Robert C. Blackmon

HIRAM MOREY saw the couple walking beside the highway a few minutes after his coupé left Asheville's Beaucatcher Tunnel

A bit ugly cold wind sighed through the pines on either side of the raised road and though it was dark, Morey had not bothered to turn on his lights. There was another car a hundred feet ahead and he saw the walking couple by its lights.

The man was tall and young. Overcoat tails and dark trousers whipped about his thin legs in the cold wind

Hiram Morey knew the difference between a .45 and a thousand-dollar-bill and he reached for the right one when the time came

The girl looked small and cold, like with the wind wrapping a light green coat about her slender figure. She carried a small green handbag. She looked so cold that Morey shivered despite his heavy black overcoat and fur-lined leather driving gloves.

Then he grinded and his big feet lifted to brake and clutch.

The world had treated him well. H -

one-man Asheville detective agency paid well. The papers played up his last case, with his picture. Tonight, he was headed for Ravel Sava's Red Mill three miles out the Black Mountain Road, to meet one of the wealthiest men in Asheville. Jason Empster President of the Carolina Trust Company, Empster was good for a top fee and the job he wanted done was probably a cinch.

Morey felt like sharing his good fortune—and the girl in the green coat looked very cold.

If the car ahead passed the couple, he would give them a lift as far as the Mill. He might even give them a few bucks. They were broke, or they wouldn't be hitch-hiking. Just thinking of their gratitude made him feel warm inside. He killed the speed of the coupé.

The car ahead neared the walking couple. It was running too fast to stop beside them. A third car turned a curve in the highway ahead and its headlights raced toward Asheville.

Morey touched his brake pedal again and leaned forward to switch on his own lights before picking up the couple.

Then a tongue of red-yellow flame spat out from the side of the car ahead and reached for the young man and the girl. A pistol shot cracked sharply in the cold night.

Morey's black eyes snapped wide open. He yelled instinctively and his foot hit the brake pedal hard. The coupé motor stalled. He saw the young man spin, catch the girl by the shoulder and whirl her around. A thrust of his arm sent the girl across the road shoulder and over the edge of the embankment to the right of the highway. She stumbled once, then went down the embankment with her slim silken legs moving in a frantic, leaping run.

Flame streaked from the car ahead as the gun fired twice.

The young man sprinted around the front of the moving car and raced to the left, across the highway. Morey could see his tall, straining figure clearly in the headlights. He knew instantly that the young man was trying to draw the gunfire from the girl and to himself. The girl reached the bottom of the embankment and ran into the woods.

Morey yelled again and tried to get the left door of the coupé open. Before he found the door handle, he saw the young man cross the center of the highway and run directly into the path of the car speeding toward Asheville.

There was a banshee wail of skidding rubber, the frightened squawl of a horn, then the front of the speeding car plowed into the young man's running figure and tossed it to the left. The car rocked past Morey's stalled coupé with all four wheels locked and its twin stop-lights flaring redly in the night.

The car ahead of Morey doubled its speed with a bursting roar of power and streaked away along the highway toward Oteen. It got away so fast that Morey couldn't be sure of the license number. He knew only that it was a silver and maroon North Carolina plate and that the first two numbers could be—34.

Then he got the coupé door open and tumbled out. There was sweat on his broad face as he ran across the pavement to the huddled shape of the young man.

A man all but fell out of the other car and stumbled toward him, yelling shrilly.

"I couldn't help it! He ran right in front of me!"

Morey reached the huddled shape

on the left side of the road and bent over it. Cold wind tugged at the tails of his overcoat and flopped the brim of his black felt hat. He slid the heavy gloves from his hands and started an examination of the injured man.

He thought he felt the uneven thrumming of heartbeats, then he saw that the young man was breathing raggedly. There was a smear of blood on his thin, pale face. He stirred a little and moaned. He looked very young, in his early twenties.

"He ran right in front of me!" the driver of the other car yelled almost in Morey's ear. "Nobody can blame me for—"

"Stop yelling!" Morey flared over his shoulder. "Do something. Get to a telephone and call a doctor. This kid is badly hurt."

He turned his attention back to the injured man. The driver behind him stopped yelling, but did not move. Morey's big fingers touched paper in the young man's breast pocket. Light from the coupé showed him that it was an opened letter. The envelope was addressed to — *Daniel A. Bergen, 4679 Haywood Street, Asheville, N. C.*

THEN Morey sensed the presence of the driver behind him. He came around on his heels, harsh words rising to his lips. Before he could say anything he heard the wail of a siren in the direction of Asheville. It was coming toward him, fast.

A highway patrol car stopped behind his coupé and two uniformed patrolmen got out. Light glinting on black leather gauntlets.

"What's all the—" one of them started gruffly, then: "Oh, hello, Morey. What happened?"

"He ran right in front of me, officer!" the man beside Morey yelled

shrilly. "Nobody can blame me! This man saw it! He can tell you I did everything! There wasn't time to stop! I—"

The patrolman's eyes jumped to Morey, questioningly. The other officer had gone to Bergen and was bending over him.

Morey's mind moved fast.

The driver of the other car had apparently missed the presence of the girl in the other car and the shots. Now, it was just a case of Daniel A. Bergen running across the highway and getting hit. Being held for questioning would make him late for his meeting with Jason Empster. He might lose the Empster fee, and it promised to be a nice one.

"That's right, McNeil." Morey spread big hands. "This man did everything he could, but—" Broad shoulders lifted. "Look, McNeil, I've got an important client waiting for me. It means a nice fee I can't afford to lose it."

"How's about taking the kid to the hospital and let me drop around later. You know me. I wouldn't try to skip. If it wasn't for losing that fee—"

"Well—all right." McNeil nodded reluctantly. "I'm not supposed to do it, but go ahead. Drop around within two hours, though, or I'll have a pickup sent out."

"Get in this guy's car with the kid, Joe. I'll lead the way in the patrol bus to Mission Hospital on Woodfin. It's nearest."

Morey's ears, nose and cheeks were stinging with the cold as he hurried to his coupé and started to get in.

Then he saw the small green handbag lying on the right edge of the pavement in front of his coupé. He knew instantly that the girl had dropped it when she ran down the embankment.

A quick glance showed him that McNeil and the others were busy with Bergen. Black eyes very bright, he strode around the front of the coupe, scooped the bag from the pavement.

Moments later, he was gunning the night car along the highway toward the Red Mill.

He ran for about three minutes, fast, then took his foot from the gas pedal. Coasting along and holding the wheel with one hand, he opened the green bag and examined its contents by the light of the dash.

There was a thin roll of bills, a powder compact, a few loose stamps and a ball chain with a brass key and identification tag on it. Letters imprinted on the tag read—*Please return to Clara Erick, Apt B2, 842 Patton Avenue, Asheville, N.C.*

Morey's wide mouth puckered as he crammed the bag into his overcoat pocket.

So the kid and the girl weren't broke and weren't transients. They lived right in Asheville. They weren't married, judging from the separate addresses. But why should they be walking out on the Oteen road on a near freezing night? Why should someone take a few shots at them?

HE HAD answered neither question by the time he reached the Red Mill. Large and painted a bright red, the place vaguely resembled a windmill without the sails. It was very popular with Asheville's smart set, as well as with summer visitors. Ravel Sava served good meals, but that wasn't the main attraction Morey had heard that the upstairs gambling rooms of the Mill grossed more money than many large business houses in Asheville.

There were few people in the main room of the place because of the early

hour—about eight P. M. Morey saw a tall, gray-haired man in one of the booths along the side of the room. The man was Jason Empster. He had seen Empster's picture in the papers several times. Empster, he'd heard, spent a night or two each week in the upstairs rooms of the Mill.

Cramming his gloves into his overcoat pockets, Morey slid onto the bench opposite Empster.

"Morey. Splendid. Just like your newspaper pictures. Glad you came promptly." Empster made no offer to shake hands. He talked jerkily, long pale fingers toying with his cigar. His small, almost colorless eyes seemed to stare at a spot a few inches above Morey's head. His brows were thick and gray above the eyes. "Something to eat or drink?"

Morey shook his head. Taking his hat off, he put it on the booth table and opened his overcoat because of the warmth in the Mill. There was an old-fashioned on the table before Empster. It looked tempting, but Morey never drank while working.

"You wanted to see me—" he started easily.

"Well, I want you to find someone within the shortest possible space of time." Empster rubbed at a spot on a pale thumbnail and flicked an imaginary speck from the sleeve of his dark coat. "Speed is vital and the matter must be most confidential. I want you to find a—ah—former employee of my firm, a young man by the name of Daniel A. Bergen."

Hiram Morey jumped. He couldn't help it.

"Bergen is in the Mission Hospital. There was an—"

He stopped, wishing that he hadn't spoken so quickly. He continued, speaking slower and choosing his words.

"There was an accident. Bergen was taken to Mission Hospital by two highway patrolmen."

He explained swiftly, omitting all mention of the girl in the green coat, the gunfire and the third car.

"You—you're positive it was Bergen?" Empster's voice was thin and strained.

Morey nodded.

Empster cleared his throat. His long fingers took a billfold from his pocket, selected a banknote and slid it across the table toward Morey.

"That," he said softly, "is your fee for finding Bergen, quickly."

Morey's black brows almost touched. He had expected an easy job and a top fee, but nothing like this. The banknote was a thousand dollar one!

"Now, I have another person for you to find" Empster coughed dryly. "A young lady named Clara Erick. She lives, or did live, in an apartment on Patton Avenue. Until yesterday, she was employed by an Asheville department store. Find her quickly—and quietly and I can promise another . . ."

Empster's colorless eyes went to the thousand dollar note on the table.

Morey frowned at the bill. A thousand for Bergen. A thousand for the girl in the green coat. It didn't feel right.

"I don't know whether—" he started. Then he saw a small, dapper man in a perfectly creased tux coming toward the booth. The man was Rave! Sava, owner of the Red Mill. Morey slid the thousand dollar bill into his vest pocket.

My old friend, Morey." Sava spoke softly as he stopped beside the booth. Everything about him seemed soft, but Morey knew him to be as hard as the next man when necessary. Sava had to

be hard and tough to run the Mill. "And you, Empster. My boys are taking care of you?" His dark eyes jumped to the trust company man.

"No complaint." Empster said

"Well, I'll see what I can do and call you, Empster."

Morey got to his feet, buttoning his overcoat. Recovering his hat, he refused an offer of a drink from Sava and left the Mill. His brows were touching in a deep frown as he headed the coupé for Asheville.

Something was wrong. Empster was after Bergen and the girl two thousand dollars worth. Someone else was after them bad enough to try killing them. Empster said Bergen was a former employee. The girl had been a clerk in a store. There was no apparent connection between her and Empster except through her being with Bergen. It didn't make sense. Empster wouldn't be paying two grand for the kid and the girl unless it meant plenty to him. Bergen could have stolen from the firm. But the girl . . .

Morey's big hand patted the overcoat pocket containing the girl's green handbag. He nodded slowly and started whistling tunelessly.

The girl had, undoubtedly, gotten away all right after running down the embankment. She had run as if none of the shots had touched her. There was a good chance that she might head for her apartment.

Morey's big foot clamped down on the gas pedal. He hardly saw the cold windswept pavement gliding under his headlights. He hardly noticed when the coupé rumbled through Beaucatcher Tunnel.

THE apartment building on Patton Avenue was second from the corner, old and dingy. Patton Avenue

seemed entirely deserted for blocks as Morey rolled the coupe past the place. He turned the corner and parked on the sloping side street, about halfway between the corner and an alley.

For a moment he considered going in through the alley and trying to reach the girl's apartment by way of the fire escape which he knew would be at the rear of the building. He decided against that.

Leaving the coupe, he walked back to the corner and went to the entrance of the apartment building.

There was no one in the little lobby. A narrow flight of carpeted stairs led from the lobby to the upper floors. There was no elevator. Morey went up the stairs.

He got about halfway up, then his big right foot stopped in mid-air, inches short of the next step, as a pistol blasted on the second floor of the four storied building. The roar of the shot was almost deafening. He missed the next step and almost fell as he tried to plunge up the remaining steps at top speed. The pistol blasted again and a woman screamed shrilly.

Morey floundered up two steps and got his balance. He went up on the run, big legs driving. His nostrils flared as he reached the second floor. There was a smell of cordite in the air. He skidded around a sharp turn in the second floor hall and got the gun from under his left arm. There was an open door a short distance ahead down the hall.

Light from the door made a bright fan in the lesser light of the hall. A tall shadow came into the fan and a man stumbled out into the hall, his height seeming to decrease a foot at each step. Then his knees suddenly gave away and he dropped to the floor. A gun slid out of his right hand as he struck and rolled over on his back.

Somewhere on the upper floor of the building several women started screaming. A door banged somewhere.

Overcoat tails flapping, Morey sprinted along the hall. He reached the man on the floor and a quick glance was enough to tell him that the man was dead. He had been shot twice in the chest. There were two dark, growing stains on the front of his coat.

Then Morey knew who the man was—Ches Waite. He had seen Waite around Asheville for some time, selling baseball tip boards. He was selling them for Ravel Sava, according to the wise talk.

A sound from the room from which Waite had come perked Morey about. He heard heels clatter across the floor. A window squealed up, and the heels clattered on iron. Morey knew instantly that someone in the apartment was leaving by way of the fire escape.

He plunged through the doorway and saw, in passing, the brass letter and figure on the door panels—B2. The apartment was Clara Erick's.

Morey ran into a living room. There was a single door in the side wall. He went through it and into a bedroom. There was a cheap overnight bag open on the bed. Clothing was wadded into the bag and there were a number of pink silk things on the bed, apparently thrown there in a hurry.

Then Morey saw the open window in the rear wall of the bedroom, the iron railing of a fire escape outside. Someone's heels were clacking on the iron.

Three long strides took him across the room and he ducked out into the cold night.

Somewhere above him, a woman was screaming at the top of her voice. It made him nervous. A man started shouting something.

Then below, Morey saw a small figure going down the fire escape at top speed. Enough light spilled in through the alley mouth for him to see that the figure was that of a small, slim girl. She wore a light green coat. She was Clara Erick—the girl whom Empster wanted along with Dan Bergen.

Even as Morey recognized her, the girl stopped, turned. She was almost at the bottom of the fire escape. She raised her hand and flame spat from it. Gun roar rocked the alley. Something hit the edge of the iron platform beneath Morey's feet and zinged off into the night.

He ducked instinctively, then grunted as he saw the girl jump from the fire escape and run toward the mouth of the alley. Her small figure was silhouetted for a moment, green coat flying about her, then she was gone, running to the right.

Morey went after her, risking a broken neck as he all but fell down the fire escape. Above him, the woman was still screaming and the man was yelling for the police.

Morey reached the alley mouth and saw Clara Erick near the farther corner. She was running for a taxicab which showed bright stoplights. Morey saw her jump into the cab, then he turned and sprinted for his coupé, parked at the curb in the opposite direction.

By the time he reached his coupé, the cab was turning left at the corner. He went after it, gunning the coupé around the turn on two wheels. The cab was not quite a block ahead. Morey cut his speed and drifted along behind it.

The cab cut a few corners, turned back into Patton. Morey followed it along Patton to Lexington, down Lexington to Aston, then up Biltmore to-

ward the Square. The cab pulled into the curb near the Square and let the girl out in front of a brightly lighted movie theater.

Morey found a parking place and left the coupé as Clara Erick crossed the sidewalk toward the ticket booth of the theater. Armed with a hastily bought ticket, he was almost at the girl's heels as she entered.

IGNORING the usher in the dimly lighted theater, Clara Erick headed for the usually unwanted seat section far to one side and well down front. Morey followed and slid into a seat behind the one she selected. The seats around them were empty. Morey took the green handbag from his overcoat pocket and held it over the girl's shoulder.

"This, I believe," he said softly, "is your bag, Miss Erick. You dropped it out on the Oteen road."

The girl sat very stiffly for a moment. There was a ridiculously small green hat on her smooth blonde hair. It was held by a green strap that went around the back of her head. She looked to be about eighteen years old. Her head turned slowly, as if against her will.

"You are mistaken." She spoke as if her teeth were clenched. "I am not Clara Erick. I have lost no bag. If you continue to molest me, I shall call the—"

"Dan Bergen."

Morey spoke the name softly. He heard the girl gasp. She twisted about in the seat.

"Where is he?" There was a shrill note of hysteria in her voice.

"Not here." Morey said that quickly, warningly. "People are watching, listening. Come out to my car."

"No! I—"

Morey got to his feet and started up the aisle, carrying the green handbag. He had taken only a few steps when he heard Clara Erick behind him.

In the coupé, he dropped the green handbag into her lap and reached for the ignition switch.

"Don't!" Clara Erick stiffened on the seat beside him. "We can talk here, Mr. —"

"Morey Hiram Morey."

Grinning reassuringly, Morey found a business card. The girl took it with her left hand. Her right was at the neck of her green wool knitted dress, scarlet nails bright against her white fingers. Her eyes, Morey saw, were large and blue. She read the card, dropped it. Beyond her, people were hurrying along the sloping, brightly lighted sidewalk. Ahead of the coupé, several busses grumbled up the Patton hill and made the loop about the square.

"You're a detective," The girl said that abruptly. "I saw your picture in the papers, something about recovering jewelry. You're after Dan and —"

"You've got me wrong," Morey shook his head. "I'm a *private* detective. I'm not connected with the Asheville police department. I'm not after Dan, and I'm not after you. I just want to know what all this —"

"I have a gun!" Clara Erick thrust her right hand deeper into the neck of her dress. Morey could see the outlines of a small revolver against the knitted wool fabric. "I have shot one man already tonight. You are going to tell me where Dan is right now, or I'm going to—shoot you!"

She caught at the gun in her bosom. Her fingers missed the gun butt and she tried again.

Morey tried to control his grin.

"Dan is a patient in Mission Hospital," he told her. "He was hit by a car out on the Oteen road and two highway patrolmen took him to the hospital. Dan's all right. Now, I want to know what all this is about. I—"

"You are going to take me to Mission Hospital right now!" Spots of color flamed in the girl's small, pale face. Her eyes seemed much larger. She managed to grasp the gun butt. "You're going to take me, or—" She lifted the gun a little.

"I'll be glad to," Morey told her gently. "Dan got hit trying to keep you from being shot. Doing a thing like that makes Dan Bergen rate tops with me. You're Dan's friend, so . . ."

He got the coupé into motion and turned into the Square. Leaving the Square at Spruce Street, he went through to Woodfin. Rolling along Woodfin, he talked swiftly, persuasively.

"Listen, girl. Tell me what all this is about. I can help you and Dan. But before I can, I've got to know what to do."

"I—can't tell you much until I talk to Dan." Clara Erick's eyes probed him. "We're in trouble. Someone is after us. We—I can't tell you." Her husky voice shook. Her right hand stayed at the neck of her dress, near the gun in her bosom.

Morey drove on to Mission Hospital on Woodfin Street.

There was a shiny ambulance pulling out of the hospital drive as he parked the coupé in front of the big building. The ambulance turned into Woodfin and headed toward Beaucatcher Tunnel. It was moving fast, the men in it but vague blurs in the darkness.

Morey followed Clara Erick into the hospital. They stopped at the information desk.

"Mr. Daniel A. Bergen left Mission Hospital a few moments ago as a private patient," the nurse at the desk told them firmly. "He left in a private ambulance."

Clara Erick stood perfectly still for a moment, her slim figure rigid, then her fingers were biting into Morey's arm.

"They've got Dan!" He could feel her jerking spasmodically. "They—"

Morey caught her arm and all but dragged her from the hospital and down the front steps.

"Get the Asheville police after that ambulance!" Morey flung over his shoulder as he slid under the wheel of the coupé. Clara Erick stood on the curb. "Call the highway patrol office, the Sheriff's office. Give them my name. I'm going after it and—"

"I'm going, too!"

The girl got in and slammed the door as the coupé started moving.

Morey fed gas and raced along Woodfin toward Beaucatcher Tunnel. Stopping to argue with the girl would take time, and time might mean a lot to Daniel A. Bergen now.

Motor noise beat at them as they raced through the Tunnel. Morey fed gas with a reckless foot.

DAN is in that ambulance. I can help him." Morey kept his eyes on the road. The coupé was reaching for its top speed. "But before I do, I've got to know what all this is about. You'd better talk fast if you want to help Dan now."

"It—it's about bonds, I think." Clara Erick talked jerkily. She was staring through the windshield, watching for the tail light of the ambulance. "I don't know exactly what it is—but they are after Dan. He wouldn't tell me, because he said it was dangerous for me to

know. He came to my apartment yesterday morning, early, and told me we had to leave Asheville right away. He said *they* were after him. It wasn't because Dan did anything wrong," she put that in quickly. "It was—I don't know. He said *they* were after me too. I didn't understand it, but—I trust Dan."

Morey's big head nodded slowly.

"Dan wouldn't let me pack anything. He said if we tried to take anything we might lose enough time for them to get us. He said to forget about my job. He wanted to leave Asheville right then, but decided we'd better wait until last night. We stayed in picture shows all day, to hide. Dan said criminals did that to hide from the police. We started to leave last night, but Dan said we'd try to get a few of our things. We didn't have anything but the clothes we wore and a few dollars each. We stayed in the woods near Town Mountain road last night and I almost froze. Dan said we'd get some of our things today, leave Asheville and never come back. He made me stay in a picture show this morning while he went to see if he could get some of our things. He came back without them. Men were watching both his room and my apartment. We stayed in the picture show until dark and tried to leave tonight. Dan said we would walk a while, then thumb a ride. That way, we could never be traced. Dan said *they'd* find us if we tried to take a train or a bus."

The girl caught her breath, rushed on.

"Then those men shot at us. Dan pushed me down the embankment and I ran into the woods. I didn't know what to do. I hid in the woods and waited for Dan to call, but he never did. Then I walked in the woods toward Asheville for a long time, then

climbed the embankment again. After a while a truck came along and I got the driver to bring me to Asheville and let me out near my apartment. There was a man watching it—the man I shot. I went up the fire escape to the apartment of a girl friend on the third floor. I didn't have any money and I knew I'd need some. I borrowed fifteen dollars from her. I was going to send it back when Dan and I got away. I thought Dan would know I'd gone back to the apartment and come there for me. When I was in the girl's apartment I saw the gun—it was her brother's—and asked for it. They were after us and I thought Dan might need the gun when we got together again. After I got the money and the gun, I went back down the fire escape to my apartment and started packing some of my things—they were hope-chest pieces—Dan and I were planning to get married some time. I wanted them, because we were going to get married somewhere and never come back to Asheville."

Clara Erick croaked a moment.

"The man must have seen the light go on in my apartment. I'd hardly started packing my things when he opened the door and took a gun from his pocket. I shot him. Then you came. I saw you in the light from the window when I shot at you on the fire escape. I knew it was you following me into the theater. I—I was scared."

She stopped talking.

Morey grunted. The thing sounded like a nightmare—but the shots out on the Oteen road had been real—the dead man in the hall was real—the one grand note in his vest pocket was real.

The coupé bored through the night. It passed the golf course, the Veterans' Hospital and raced along the Black Mountain road.

Morey was scowling thoughtfully.

The ambulance could have turned off before now, but with Dan Bergen aboard, it would probably run out the Black Mountain road and dump a dead Dan Bergen in some isolated cove a few miles from Asheville. There would be too many cars on Highway 74.

He stared through the windshield and kept the gas pedal to the floor.

The road ahead was dark as far as he could see. There were no cars in sight. For a few moments a mumbly feeling of having lost swept over him. Then he saw the twin pinpoints of red tail-lights lift over the brow of a hill far ahead. They showed for but a few seconds before the machine bearing them swooped down the slope beyond.

Morey's big fists tightened on the wheel rim. His right foot tried to shove the gas pedal down farther. Beside him, Clara Erick started sobbing.

"Please! Catch them! They'll hurt Dan!"

The red pinpoints showed again and again dropped out of sight.

Morey pulled off his gloves with his teeth and dropped them. Driving with one hand for a moment, he got his overcoat open and cleared his holstered gun so it could be reached with little trouble.

The twin tail-lights were closer when they showed again. The machine bearing them and the coupé seemed to be the only things moving upon the highway. The coupé's headlights showed wind-swinged trees, an occasional dirt side road. A house or two showed, lighted windows sailing past in the night. Morey's big arms ached with the tenseness of his muscles. Clara Erick was silent except for an occasional nervous sob.

The tail-lights came back slowly and Morey could see the glow of the other

car's headlights on the pavement beyond. The machine was the black ambulance which had left Mission Hospital as he and Clara Erick entered. His mind leaped ahead to the time when the coupé would come alongside the heavier machine.

STOPPING the ambulance would be dangerous. Running it off the road wouldn't work. The ambulance was twice the weight of his coupé. Crash-ing the ambulance, if he could do that, would endanger Dan Bergen. Putting a bullet in a rear tire—if he could do it—would be just as bad. He could overtake the ambulance, block the road and force it to

Morey's big body went rigid. His eyes leaped to the rear view mirror as he thought he heard the roar of another motor behind him. He caught the faint glint of his tail-light on chrom-ium—and knew that a car with its lights off was following his coupé

His stomach seemed to grow into a hard, cold ball. The skin of his face felt stiff and dry. He knew instantly what had happened.

There had been another car with the ambulance at Mission Hospital. The men in the car had spotted his coupé and trailed it when it went after the ambulance. He had not seen the machine, with its lights off.

He glanced at the ambulance tail-lights coming back to him slowly. His eyes went back to the mirror.

Even as he looked, the following car switched on its headlights and pulled out to the left. The headlights winked on and off three times, then stayed on. The following car started coming up alongside the speeding coupé. Ahead, the tail lights of the ambulance grew rapidly as the heavy machine slackened its speed.

Morey knew the blinking headlights were a signal. He could feel sweat coming out on his forehead. His hands became clammy on the wheel rim.

The following car came alongside the coupé, and he saw the thick barrel of a shotgun thrusting from the open right front window. The car was a dark sedan. There were two men in it, one at the wheel, the other holding the gun. It cut steadily toward the coupé, apparently attempting to force it to the side of the road.

Morey's eyes were very bright. He debated the idea of cutting abruptly to the left and taking a chance on wreck-ing the sedan, without injuring Clara Erick and himself too badly. He discarded the idea. Even if he and the girl got out of the crash alive, it wouldn't do Dan Bergen any good. It wouldn't stop the ambulance.

He thought of jerking his gun and blasting away at the sedan, on the chance of putting it out of the running. That idea also went into the discard. The shots, if they hit anything, would be luck shots. Driving a car and shoot-ing at the same time didn't make for accuracy. The shotgun thrusting from the sedan window would blast at his first move. It was probably loaded with buckshot. A charge of buckshot at close range seldom missed a target as large as a coupé, a man, and a girl.

He sighed resignedly and killed the speed of the coupé, wheeled the car out on the right road shoulder. The ambulance was about a hundred feet ahead now, stopping. Morey stopped the coupé about twenty feet behind the ambulance.

The sedan cut over beside the coupé and stopped. The shotgun thrusting from the window covered Morey and the girl. A man got out and came around the sedan. He had a gun in his

right hand. He was small and thin, and the gun glinted bluely in the headlight glow

"Pile out, and be careful!" his shrill voice came through the closed windows of the coupé. "Make it snappy!"

Clara Erick was whimpering

"Do exactly what they say," Morey told her briefly. "And keep your hands away from that gun in the front of your dress. Act helpless and scared."

"I am s-s-scared!"

"So," Morey admitted grimly, "am I!"

But he was grinning as he opened the coupé door and got out. The shotgun thrusting from the sedan window was within a foot of his head. The man who had gotten out of the sedan was about five feet from him, his gun leveled on Morey's thick chest. Clara Erick slid from the coupé and stood beside Morey. She was whimpering in fright

The man with the gun stepped forward and dug the muzzle of the weapon into Morey's stomach. Plucking the detective's gun from its holster, he stepped back. He did not search the girl. Morey could see his eyes in the headlight glow. They were little and mean and bright.

"Now ain't this something," the man giggled shrilly. He held Morey's gun in his left hand, his own in his right. "We spotted the coupé at the hospital and trailed you, with the lights off. Imagine a great big detective-like Hiram Morey getting his pictures in the papers, then falling for a gag like that!"

Morey did not say anything. His mouth kept the grin, but there was no feeling in it. Beside him, Clara Erick was silent. She was, Morey saw keeping her hands away from the front of her dress.

Then Morey saw a man get out of

the back of the ambulance and walk back toward the coupé. A gun glinted in the man's right hand. He was Ravel Sava, dapper owner of the Red Mill.

Morey's raised hands clenched. Sava's presence seemed to touch something in his mind and nudge it into place to act as a nucleus about which the happenings of the night fitted.

"My old friend Morey." Sava stopped well beyond Morey's reach. His effeminate lips were smiling, but there was no mirth nor softness in his dark eyes. "I believe we have someone in the ambulance whom you and Miss Erick might like to see."

The girl gave a little cry and started sobbing

"Morey," Sava moved the gun in his hand, "take her to the ambulance. Johnny, you and Mac take the sedan back to the Mill. Be sure to explain to the help that I haven't left the Mill all evening. I'll have Sam drive Morey's coupé somewhere and lose it."

The thin man went back to the sedan

"Hurry, Morey." There was a velvety softness in Sava's voice. "And I don't have to tell you that I'll plug the girl first."

MOREY, caught Clara Erick's arm and led her toward the ambulance. Sava followed, well out of reach. Morey opened the double rear doors and helped the girl into the machine, got in after her. Sava got in after him and closed the door, holding his gun ready.

"Sam," Sava called, "take Morey's coupé somewhere and ditch it, then go back to the Mill. We'll have an alibi all fixed for you."

The interior of the ambulance was in semi-darkness. Morey could see the figure of a man sitting on a low jump-chair near the front. There was a

wheeled stretcher table along the right side of the machine. The figure of a slightly built man was on the stretcher, covered with a blanket. That man was Dan Bergen, Morey knew. On the front seat of the ambulance, he could see the heads and shoulders of two men. One of them moved, got out of the ambulance. Morey was hunched on a jumpchair about halfway along the left side of the machine. The girl was to his right, on another jumpchair. She was whimpering and calling Dan's name. Sava was beyond her, crouching near the closed rear doors of the ambulance.

"All right, Burke," Sava called, "get the bus moving. Empster and I can handle."

"Sava!" The man on the jumpchair near the front spoke sharply. "My name! These people—"

Morey grunted in the semi-darkness. The man was Jason Empster, president of the Carolina Trust Company. The ambulance started moving.

"Forget it," Sava laughed softly. "Within an hour these people will be talking to Saint Peter!"

"No! Sava! That's murder!" Empster's voice shook. "I can't become involved in—"

"You *are* involved," Sava chuckled. "You're in all the way, my good friend, and you're going to stay. I might even let you handle Morey and the girl to be sure you do stay in."

Empster's horrified gasp was loud above the rumble of the motor.

Morey's head swiveled. He saw his coupé headlights through the rear window. They made a U turn and headed toward Asheville. Morey sighed.

"Listen, Sava," he started persuasively, "you can't possibly get away with three murders. You'd be caught. The smart thing to do is let the girl and Bergen—"

"No! Don't let them go, Sava!" There was a shrill, cracked note in Empster's voice." Bergen saw the bonds. He must have told the girl They—"

"Shut up," Sava cut in. "We do as we planned. No one else saw the bonds so you can handle them okay. Try something else, Morey." He laughed again, and the sound was oddly chilling in the warmth of the ambulance.

Morey's big shoulders lifted. The girl beside him was slumped down in her jumpchair, crying.

"So Empster lost heavily at the Mil. and you make him take some hot bonds off your hands, eh, Sava?" Morey turned his head to look at Sava, beyond Clara Erick. Empster was to his left, at the end of Bergen's stretcher. "You got the hot bonds through your underworld connections, for about ten cents on the dollar. Empster paid you many times that. He put the bonds in his vault. Bergen, working for the company, saw the bonds and spotted them as hot. As a loyal employee, he went to Empster with the information, not thinking that his boss was crooked."

"A bullseye, shamus," Sava was squatting against the rear doors, his gun resting on his knee, the muzzle covering Morey and the girl. "You're almost as bright as the newspapers said. Bergen was honest and dumb. He thought he was doing Empster a favor. Empster was in a spot. He tried to quiet Bergen and carried it too far. Bergen got scared and fainted. Empster thought he might talk, and told me. I sent Johnny after the kid. Bergen got away from Johnny. We thought he might have told the girl. I sent Johnny after her, but Bergen got there first. We couldn't find them. Empster got nervous and called you, thinking you could find them and we could take care

of you later. Then Johnny and Mac saw the kids out on the Oteen road and blasted. That wasn't smart, but Johnny and Mac didn't have much choice. The kids had to be stopped before they talked. Johnny and Mac came here and told me. That was before you came. I'd put Ches Waite on the girl's apartment, to take her when she showed. Another man was watching Bergen's place, but the kid never came. "Sava shrugged." You were running behind Johnny and Mac out on the Oteen road without lights, and they didn't know you were anywhere's around. Bergen had seen Johnny, and trying to pick him and the girl up wouldn't work. So, they blasted."

"Ches Waite is dead."

Morey said that slowly. Beside him, Clara Erick's body rocked with the swaying of the ambulance.

"Clara Erick shot Waite when he tried to get her in the apartment." Morey's eyes kindled brightly as the girl lurched badly, almost fell from the chair. "She's—" His voice jumped to a yell. "She's fainted, Sava! She's going to fall!"

His big arms moved out as though to catch the girl and hold her. Clara Erick, frightened, started a scream. Morey's big left hand clamped down over her mouth. His right hand found the neck of her dress. Knitted green wool stretched and he got his hand on the butt of the gun in the girl's bosom.

"Get away from that girl, Morey!" Sava yelled. "Get away before I—"

MOREY straightened as if to obey. He slid the gun from the neck of Clara Erick's dress, jerked it around and shot Ravel Sava just above the bridge of the nose. The crash of the gun was deafening in the ambulance.

Sava dropped his gun. His small,

dapper body rocked forward and he fell to the floor.

Jason Empster yelled sharply and jerked to his feet, forgetting the low ceiling of the ambulance. His head rammed into the steel top. The gun he had half drawn from his overcoat pocket dropped to the floor. He stood in a crouch, his hands going to his head, and a pained moan came from him. His dark hat was jammed down over his eyes.

Morey lunged forward. His big right arm shot out and he laid the barrel of the gun in his hand along the side of Empster's head. The tall trust company president made a choking sound and started to sag to the floor. Morey hit him again, harder, and Empster dropped.

The ambulance swerved as Burke twisted in his seat and reached for his shoulder holstered gun.

"Hold it, Burke!"

Morey's right arm shot out and he ground the muzzle of the gun into the back of Burke's neck. Burke shuddered. He turned carefully and put both hands on the steering wheel. His eyes were glassy, his face white.

"That's right," Morey told him. "Turn around at the next side road and head for Asheville. If you try to jump or wreck the bus—"

Morey touched the back of Burke's neck again with the gun muzzle. He took Burke's gun and backed to the jumpseat which Empster had been using. His big nose wrinkled as he sniffed at the reek of cordite in the air and looked about the ambulance.

Empster was on the floor at his feet, unconscious. Ravel Sava was on the floor near the back doors, dead. Dan Bergen was beginning to stir and moan on the stretcher. Clara Erick was on her knees beside the stretcher. The lit-

the green pillbox hat was awry on her rumpled blonde hair. The front of her dress was torn about the neck. She had one hand on Bergen's pale cheek and soft sounds came from her lips.

Hiram Morey sighed and relaxed on the jumpseat. His eyes looked wet.

Clara Erick bent over Dan Bergen and kissed him several times.

Hiram Morey gulped. He touched the thousand-dollar bill in his vest pocket. He grinned.

Clara Erick and Dan Bergen would get married now. They would need a lot of things. Dan would be in the hospital for a while and that would cost plenty. Neither of the kids had a job. Empster had paid the thousand dollars

as a fee, hoping to get a chance to kill Dan Bergen.

Empster and Sava had wanted to locate Dan and Clara and cover the crookedness with the hot bonds via murder. That made the thousand dollars—well, sort of blood money. It would be a sort of joke on Empster and Sava if he gave the thousand to Dan and Clara for a wedding present.

His grin broadened. He nodded slowly.

Hiram Morey didn't need blood money. The world was treating him well. There would be other cases and fees—and just thinking of Dan's and Clara's surprise and gratitude had him feel warm inside.

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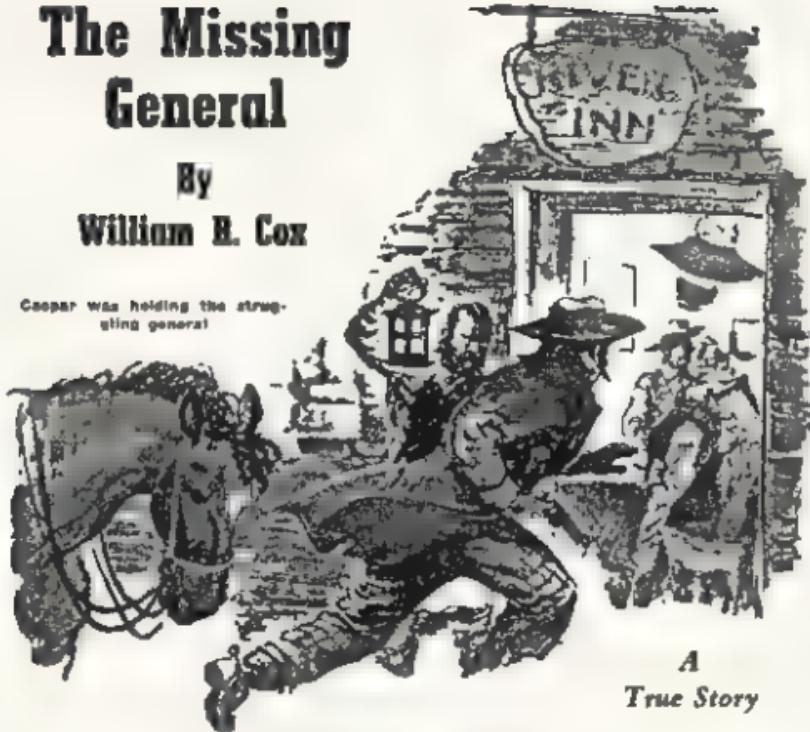
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The Missing General

By
William R. Cox

Cooper was holding the strung-general



*A
True Story*

THE youth in coarse homespun rode blithely into the clearing. He was a tall, wide-shouldered, brown-eyed lad with a confident air. He was homeless, friendless, but he had a job. He rode up to the main cabin and dismounted stiffly, bearing his saddlebags with pride.

The first mail had come to Columbus, Ohio.

In 1850 the homespun youth was grown to a stout, bearded man, a handsome man, known in Washington, known in every hamlet and growing town of flourishing Ohio, the Buckeye State. He was "General" Otho Hinton, in 1850, agent in charge of the Ohio Stage Company. The Ohio Stage Com-

pany monopolized the important mail routes of the frontier. The "General" had made good.

The United States Mail was carried by private companies in those primitive days. Vast sums of money passed over its various circuits, upon stages, on sidewheelers across the broad rivers, on horseback through woods and over prairies. Those were the days before the pony express, but the famed mail carrier of the far west was born in Ohio, and the Ohio Stage Company fathered him.

It was amazing, not how much was stolen, but how little of the hard cash disappeared. Canny pioneer businessmen retained descriptions of every bill

entrusted to the mails. Depredations were usually quickly discovered. The newly-formed Secret Service of the Postal Department acted with amazing promptitude.

In 1849 and 1850, however, the Ohio Stage Company began to lose large sums with alarming frequency. In Washington the Chief of the Secret Service conferred with "General" Hampton, along the tortuous routes the word was passed that a clever crook was operating with foreknowledge of self-laden mail pouches. Public confidence in the mails was being undermined.

On the 22nd of August, 1850, between Zanesville, Ohio and Wheeling, Virginia, the east-bound mail was tapped for a large shipment of cash. There was no hold-up, no romantic bang-bang of pistols on a moonlit night. The pouch containing the money came through. But the cash was gone.

The robbery was discovered at Wheeling, the way-bills showing the shortage. The mail that went up was wafted all the way to South Carolina, where Thomas P. Shallcross was investigating the theft of some stamps.

Thomas P. Shallcross might as well have been in North Carolina, or Virginia, or Georgia. That young man was responsible for depredations upon the mails in all that vast territory of the south. In spite of his youth, he was a very valued member of the Secret Service of the Postal Department.

He was an ordinary-seeming young chap, this Tom Shallcross. He did not even wear a beard, that middle-nineteenth century mark of respectability and prosperity. He favored sideburns and a drooping moustache, which gave him a melancholy appearance and certainly did not betray the bulldog in him.

IN SOUTH CAROLINA, Tom took coach and came directly to Wheeling. His family lived in that Virginia town, but Tom did not even take time to say "hello." He called immediately upon Captain Bill Terry, a sub-agent of the Ohio Stage Company.

When Captain Terry had told his story, Tom said, "Bill, this was a key job. All those robberies have been key jobs. No pouch has been slashed."

Terry said, "Johnson, the superintendent, lost a set of keys, but that was months ago. I don't know how I happened to remember it, it was so long ago."

Shallcross said, "Who was riding the coach that night?"

"No one," said Terry lugubriously. "It came in empty. I checked that first thing Corson was driving. You know Pop Corson."

"Honest as the day is long," nodded Tom. "But the mail couldn't fly away. Bill."

"There's people think it could," said Terry. "It's like to ruin the Company. If we don't catch this thief the contract will never be let to us again."

Tom Shallcross said, "If the contract was never given again to the Ohio Stage Company I would not fret out my heart. But mail does not fly away, through a locked pouch. Let us, therefore, trace back along this route, my friend."

Captain Bill Terry provided horses and a carriage. The two men retraced the path of the mail coach, following the new macadam road which the Government had laid. Out of Wheeling, before coming to Zanesville was a way stop called Morristown. There was an inn and the two men stopped for a cooling drink.

Tom Shallcross was interested in the register. He fingered it carelessly, not

appearing to read the names. He turned to August 22nd. He closed the book and sauntered back to the tiny bar.

The landlord's son was an intelligent lad of fourteen. Tom said, "You know General Hinton, son?"

"Shore do," said the boy. "He gunme a copper."

"He was here last week," said Tom. "What room did he have?"

The boy said, "I'll show you—for a copper."

Tom produced the large, round coin. They went up-stairs. It was a large room, the best in the house. It contained a fireplace, before which, in view of the warm weather, a fireboard was placed.

Tom removed the fireboard. The grate, which should have been clean, contained charred fragments. Tom carefully gathered inadequately burned letters, sealing wax, strings. There was a post bill from Hillsboro, Ohio. It was almost intact. Tom treasured it, wrapping his loot with great caution and stowing it away.

He went downstairs and Bill Terry was ready to go. In the carriage, the horses clopping along the hard road, he said suddenly, "Where do the drivers' change shifts Bill?"

Bill Terry was silent for a moment. He said finally, "I never thought of that Tom, I'm a fool."

"Then another driver started the trip?" asked Tom eagerly.

"Jake Fricker drove the first leg of that trip," said Terry. "Corson brought it in, but Jake started it."

Tom said, "I would talk with Jake. Quick!"

They caught up with Fricker at Concord. Again they repaired to a bar and Bill Terry made excuses to disappear. Tom said,

"Jake, you know me. I'm the law.

I want to ask you a question about the mails."

The Jehu, a veteran of the frontier, said, "Mr. Tom, I been hearin' things I'll tell you the truth."

General Hinton rode with you on the 22nd of August?" asked Tom.

Jake took a deep draught of corn likker. He said heavily, "The General was with me."

"Did he handle the mail bags?" asked Tom tautly.

Jake said, "I better tell you the hull thung. The General got on at Zanesville. He climb up on the box with me. We smoked and he talked. You know how the General talks?"

"I have heard the gentleman," said Tom.

"Ah," said Jake. "Eggsactly. Come dark, the General acts sorta played out. He says 'Jake, I am gonna take a nap. I will get under the canvas and you kin gimme one of them mail pouches for a pillow.' He says, 'Gimme a through pouch, Jake, as I do not want to be waked up at every post office'"

Tom said, "A through pouch? There was only the one?"

"Yep," said Jake. "Just the one. When I reached the end of my drive and Pop took over, the General was still asleep."

Tom said, "Jake, you keep still about this."

"I been keepin' still about it," said Jake with dignity. "I didn't have nobody I could tell it to. The General's a big man, Mr. Tom."

It was necessary to tell Captain Bill Terry. That worthy looked very solemn. Tom said, "I know. The General is a big man. But a thief is a thief."

Captain Terry said, "Hinton is well acquainted at Washington. He is intimate with senators, politicians of all stripes. He is wealthy, respected."

"He talks too much," said Tom shortly "Let's go to Zanesville."

In that town they discovered that Mr Moses Wheeler, a local banker, had on August 22nd mailed a large package of eastern bank notes. These notes had not got through to Wheeling. The banker had kept a full description of them. Tom made careful copies.

The bulldog was beginning to stir beneath the Secret Service Agent's mild exterior. He used the new telegraph and ascertained that General Otho Hinton had been seen in Pittsburgh. He went to Pittsburgh.

The General had gone to Cleveland. The General had begun to manifest elusiveness. Tom Shallcross, travel-weary but determined, sent another telegram, this time to Postmaster D. M. Haskell, at Cleveland.

GENERAL OTHO HINTON, well known in the up and coming town, strolled up and down the main streets of Cleveland, a portly, important man, well-dressed, well-barbered. He spoke to various acquaintances in loud assured accents, flourishing his beaver hat. He did not appear to notice the two men who followed, watching.

He went into Crittenden & Co.'s brokerage house. After a time he reappeared, no longer loitering, going hastily towards his hotel.

Into Crittenden's office popped D. M. Haskell and U. S. Marshall Thomas McKinstry Haskell, an impetuous man, enquired immediately,

"Mr. Crittenden, did General Hinton just exchange some money with you?"

"Yes," said the broker, "and here it is. I haven't yet arranged the bills."

Haskell referred to Tom Shallcross's long telegram. He examined the notes left by Hinton, comparing them to the

list Tom had forwarded. He proclaimed loudly

"That's the money! General Hinton is a thief!"

Crittenden said, "Now wait, Postmaster . . ."

"A thief! It is proven," said Haskell dramatically "We shall swear out a warrant!"

McKinstry protested, "That agent, Shallcross, said you should just watch Hinton. He said not to arrest him."

"I know my duty," said Haskell stubbornly "I am going to the Commissioner and swear out a warrant!"

In Pittsburgh, Tom Shallcross was ferreting about. In the bank of Sibbet and Jones, General Hinton had been before him. Notes had been exchanged. Again they were bills from the foot of August 22nd.

Tom wired Haskell again, asking him to keep Hinton under strict surveillance, but warning him not to arrest the canny General. Then he tumbled into a stagecoach to take up the trail. The bulldog was closing in.

But Haskell had sworn out his warrant. Haskell had General Otho Hinton, who had carried the first mail into Columbus, incarcerated in the Cleveland bastille. And the screams that emanated from that hoosegow were heard all the way to Washington, where Millard Fillmore had newly assumed the office of President of the United States.

Haskell heard himself denounced as an idiot, threatened with loss of his job. The imposing General called upon the local police, the militia and the Navy to get him out of the clink. Haskell began to regret his rashness. The

General bellowed for his rights as an American citizen and the eagle squawked in raucous indignation

Haskell became slightly confused and more than a little frightened. He allowed the Commissioner to sway him, he shrank from Hinton's accusations. Hinton was released in custody of McKinstry and the local city marshall, a Colonel Abbey. These three repaired to an inn known as The Weddell House, where they were to spend the night in one of the parlours, until Hinton could, in the morning, obtain counsel

Hinton quieted down. They dined, and as was the custom of those hearty days, drank Hinton, a man of great experience, talked. He had a fund of anecdotes, but his style was a bit heavy. Food, liquor and verbosity had its way. McKinstry and Abbey dozed

The General was deaf with the parlour key. He locked the two officers tight in the room. He walked out of the hotel and disappeared into the night

There was no telephone to summon a night clerk in those days. By the time McKinstry and Abbey were released, General Hinton was gone from the city

TOM SHALLCROSS arrived about noon that day. He saw Haskell at once. The Postmaster stammered out the sorry details. Tom said "Every time one of you blankety blank political appointees stick your nose into the business of the Service there is trouble."

It is recorded that Haskell's ears burned for many a long day thereafter. Then the bulldog took to the road. Tom had callouses from riding stage coaches. He grew corns in the following days.

In Columbus he heard that Hinton had been seen in the vicinity of Akron.

Tom went to Akron, where as yet there were no rubber mills

The farm lady said that the fugitive had seemed half-starved and had proceeded in the direction of Ravenna. Tom pounded off to Ravenna

There was a farmer who had seen a gentleman answering the description of General Hinton. In fact, the farmer had sold this person, who purported to be a nursery salesman, a horse. Yes, he still had the money—\$85

Tom examined the bills. He knew them by heart. They corresponded to the numbers on the post bill he had rescued from behind the fireboard at Morristown!

He changed horses at Ravenna. Hinton was undoubtedly making for the Ohio River, then the hills of Virginia and western Pennsylvania. Tom rode like Paul Revere, eating little, sleeping less. The General knew he was being pursued, knew the jig was up. Tom had to stop him from making the asylum of the mountains.

Here and there he picked up hints. The General was well-known. Tom became convinced that his prey was making for the ford at Wellsville in Columbiana County. To that point he accordingly hastened.

It was midnight. A few miles from New Lisbon there was an inn. Tom was famished. He ordered a meal and questioned the innkeeper. The man replied readily that General Hinton had been there and had left about twilight, heading for the river.

Tom Shallcross never ate that meal. He jumped on his horse and rode off into the foggy night. It was hard going, the heavy mist settling down in the valleys, prohibiting speed, shadowing the road from view. But Hinton was only four hours ahead of him. Tom pushed on.

Through the billowing clouds of fog the ferryman was a ghost at the door of his dim-lit shack. He said, "Ain't no one used the ferry tonight, stranger. Thought I heerd someone tryin' to ford awhile back, but you know how it is. I'm alone so much I gets to hearing things."

Tom said, "Maybe. Get me over the river, man, I'm in a hurry."

It was three-thirty in the morning. The inn owned by Ben Way was lighted. Tom banged on the door.

Way himself opened up, holding a lantern high, peering in some excitement. Tom said,

"Ben, have you seen—"

Way roared, "It's Tom Shallcross. He warn't fur behind, Caspar!"

Tom went inside. Caspar was a huge, grinning man, a hostler well-known to Tom. He was holding the dripping, dsheveled form of General Otho Hinton.

"Tried t' break in an' steal food, he did," said Caspar. "Caught 'im by the leg, I did."

Ben Way said, "There's a reward for him, Tom, ain't there?"

"Yes," said Tom. "There will be a reward. General, I am sorry to see you in such a fix."

Hinton ceased struggling. He tried to draw himself erect. He said calmly, "Mr Shallcross, this is a mistake. I have been wronged. I will go with you peacefully. I have no fear but what justice will triumph. They will never hold me in jail. Mr Shallcross."

Tom said, "Maybe they won't, General. But I am going to put you in the jail."

TOM SHALLCROSS put General Otho Hinton in the jail. But on the 17th of January, 1851, Hinton had convinced several people of his innocence and ten thousand dollars bail was provided.

He forthwith left for parts unknown. It was several weeks later that Tom Shallcross was sent back to Ohio. He was met by a weeping bondsman, who had a letter. It read,

I have not the heart to appear for trial, and before this reaches you the turbulent waters of the mighty Mississippi will be rolling over my dead body. O. Hinton

Tom said, "The General has a fine literary style. But he is not the man to kill himself."

"I agree," said the bondsman sadly. "Can you find him again, Shallcross?"

Tom said, "It will be a pleasure to try. But the General is elusive."

He thought it out carefully. He had noted in his pursuit of criminals, that there is always a trail. Often slight allusions creep into notes written under stress—such as the suicide note. He wondered if Hinton might not be planning to escape to Mexico or Cuba via the "turbulent water of the mighty Mississippi."

Lacking a better clue, Tom took the boat for New Orleans. He arrived without incident, early in May. He registered at a hotel and went out to inspect the books of the other hostleries of the town.

The registry of the famed St Charles was one of the first he investigated. Running back through the record he came upon the signature *O. H. Hall*. The handwriting was unmistakable. The choice of initials coincided perfectly. Again the psychological error had crept in. "*O. H. Hall*" was unquestionably "*Otho Hinton*."

The St. Charles was then coincidentally, owned by a man named "Hall" and a certain "Hildreth." Tom sought out the former and asked if "*O. H.*

Hall" was a relative of the proprietor. The hotel-keeper replied that he remembered the man but he did not know him, and that "O. H. Hall" had left abruptly some weeks before.

Tom sighed and took up the trail of hotel registers once more. At the St. Louis he found the name of "O. H. H. tchcock" in badly disguised handwriting. The General was clinging tenaciously to his initials.

It was a Negro porter at the St. Louis who remembered the stout gentleman with the large brown eyes and the flowing beard. The porter had carried his bags to the pier. The General had left on the steamer *Falcon* for Cuba.

Two days later the *Falcon* returned to New Orleans. From the purser Tom learned that Hinton had indeed taken passage and was now in Havana.

Tom Shallcross could not ride a horse to Cuba. And if he could, there was at that time no extradition from the island refuge. There was nothing to do but make a report to headquarters and return to his regular pursuits of stamp thieves. Tom Shallcross was very unhappy. The General had made good his boast that no jail could hold him.

But the bulldog had not given up. In February, 1852, Tom found himself in Charleston, S. C., with time on his hands and money in his pocket. He decided that a sea voyage would be a welcome diversion. He took the steamer *Isabel* and embarked for Havana.

Upon arrival in the beautiful harbor, Tom adopted a disguise. He wore a beard. It hurt him to wear a beard. His burnsides were luxuriantly satisfactory. But Tom wore a beard in sunny Havana.

He also found General Otho Hinton. He had no trouble about it at all. He

just walked into a cigar store and there was Hinton, the proprietor of a small factory and retail outlet.

Hinton looked bad. His hair had turned gray and his body was no longer upright and portly. He had evidently suffered a stroke of some kind and about him was the air of the ever-pursued, the restless, timid demeanor of the hunted.

Tom Shallcross went back to his hotel and considered. Hinton had not recognized him. There was at least a dozen schemes which Tom's fertile mind could evolve which would trap Hinton aboard an American ship. It would be good to take back the elusive General. There were bowlers who were lacking ten thousand dollars.

But Tom was a Government employee. He went to the consul, a Mr. Campbell. That worthy was emphatic. There being no treaty between Cuba and the United States, an international incident might be evoked if Tom carried out any of his barebrained schemes for removing the General to a less healthful clime.

Tom pointed out philosophically that Hinton did not seem to be enjoying the clime of the Island. He suggested solicitously that if he were brought back to pay the penalty for his misdeeds, the General might recover his health and peace of mind. He urged that Hinton should be removed for his own good.

The consul was firm. Tom reluctantly left Cuba. But before he landed in America he made arrangements with the purser of the *Isabel* to keep an eye upon the General each trip the steamer made to Havana.

REVOLUTION broke out in Cuba. There was talk of a treaty with the United States. General Hinton, grown wary with time, sold out his in-

terests and departed for parts unknown. The General was still missing when Tom Shallcross got the news from the faithful purser.

The telegraph was extending across the country. Tom, busier than ever, unable to leave the East, kept the wires hot. The post offices of the nation were alert. Away up in Oregon, on the Columbia River, a man was keeping a hotel and running a ferry. His name was O. H. Hanover. The General was still loyal to his initials.

Tom wanted to go. But there were pressing details afoot cases too important to leave. They sent a man named Mills, who was specially deputized to make the arrest.

Mills was a braggart who was inordinately proud of his mission. He talked and talked, boasting that the long-sought General Hinton would soon be captured. He went into details. Long before he reached Oregon, the General had heard of his coming.

Mills arrived, all bluster and large pistol. He arrived at the hotel with a retinue of admiring would-be witnesses to the end of the prolonged drama. The coop was empty. The General had flown.

MR. SQUIRES, our consul at Honolulu, attempted to open negotiations for the annexation of the Pacific islands to the United States. Back in Washington, Tom Shallcross cursed.

Tom had nothing against annexation. Like all good Secret Service men the most secretive thing about him was his politics. Tom was getting along fine in the Service. He had promotions and was well thought of by everyone in the Postal Department.

But Tom had never forgotten his failure. The bulldog had long been deprived of his prey.

Tom had been about to close in. He had received information in his never-ending search. He had ascertained that General Hinton was operating a grog shop in Honolulu.

But Tom knew the General of old. The first rumor of the annexation proceedings would send him flying. The telegraph confirmed this at once. The General was gone—some said to Australia.

Tom Shallcross never forgot the missing General. The bondsmen of Columbus never forgot him. The Civil War was breeding. Lincoln was President when the final chapter was written.

Tom Shallcross received a letter from one of his many correspondents. It was post-dated Sydney, Australia. It read,

"The man known as O. H. Hanscome lived for many years in this vicinity. He engaged in various businesses, but was unsuccessful. He had a certain dread of meeting people which always handicapped him in the pursuit of trade."

"Last week this man died. He had no relatives, no friends. The people who took charge of his body turned over his meager effects to the authorities. It became undoubted that he was indeed General Otho Hinton."

"The General died a miserable death, alone, unattended. The people whom he wronged can be assured that his was not a happy lot after coming to Australia . . ."

Tom filed the letter carefully under the heading "H."

The case of the Missing General was completed. The bulldog had failed to get his grip. But Tom Shallcross did not have the feeling of utter failure. The General, as the correspondent had piously stated, had not led a happy life, neither in Australia, nor at any time



The poker was slowly pushed towards the girl

Killer's Exit

By Hugh B. Cave

HERE was something about the face of Sydney Cottrell, something sardonically evil and smug, that stirred emotions in nearly every man or woman who looked at him.

It was there in his small, far-apart eyes, in the slack curl of his mouth. It was a part of him crawling maggot-like in his blood stream.

It was visible even in the discolored newspaper portrait at which Paul Lake was staring. It brought the portrait to life, in a way, and it made Lake shudder. This was strange. Paul Lake was a grim, gray-haired man of fifty.

He stood six-one and had the build of a college athlete gone very slightly soft. He was known to be a man with out nerves, almost without emotions.

As District Attorney, Paul Lake had been hugely successful for more than six years.

He stared at the picture. He drew a deep breath, exhaled slowly and graced. The door opened and he looked up.

It was Jeff Cardin, phlegmatic city dick, who walked into the D A's office. Other men might have knocked, but Jeff Cardin had been a city dick a long

time and never said "May I?" to anyone.

"Package for you, D.A.," he said. He put it on the desk, gave it a nudge with his hand and sent it sliding against Lake's elbow. "It was left downstairs by mistake." A scowl wrinkled his gray, angular face. "Unless you know the handwriting, I'd be careful."

"Careful?"

"With Cottrell's trial coming up, you never can tell. There's no return address on this package. That guy had a lot of friends, and people send funny things through the mail sometimes."

The District Attorney picked the package up and looked at it, and smiled as he broke the string. "It's from my daughter," he said. His daughter, Cardin knew, was in Florida for the winter. In Palm Beach, giving the rest of the lucky loafers an eyeful of her twenty-one-year-old shape in a white, form-fitting swimsuit. Lois Lake spent a lot of her time in Florida.

The D.A. unwrapped the package and lifted out a circular metal box. He seemed surprised. He opened the box and tipped out a reel of eight millimeter movie film and frowned at it. Then he laughed. He had a soft, pleasant laugh that put little crinkles under his eyes.

"Anything," he said, "to get around the ordeal of writing me a letter. You interested in pretty girls on beaches, Cardin?"

"Pretty girls anywhere," Cardin said.

"Busy tonight?"

Cardin shook his head.

"Come out to the house with me, then. I'm alone, you know, and the evenings do drag. We'll have a look at these pictures and then go over the Cottrell case."

"Fair enough," Cardin said.

IT WAS not the first time Jeff Cardin had been inside the D.A.'s home, but as usual he looked about him and nodded his appreciation. You had to be plenty successful to maintain a home like this. You had to be more than just a city dick.

Lake, of course, had built the place for his wife, who had died three years ago. But he had kept it up, despite her passing. Kept himself up, too. The man deserved a lot of credit.

After dinner, the District Attorney led Cardin to the hobby-room in the basement, a big, beautiful room with tile floor, paneled walls, a bar and a projection booth. Amateur movies took up a lot of Lake's time and a lot of his daughter's.

"Cocktail, Cardin?"

"Straight," Cardin said.

Drink in hand, the city dick sprawled in a big, comfortable chair while Lake made ready the projector. Lake himself did not drink. Never had. "Cottrell," he said conversationally, "is still defiant. I had a talk with him today, and when I told him he was through this time, through for good, he laughed at me."

"A week from now," Jeff Cardin said darkly, "he'll be laughing in the death house."

"I hope so."

"That guy," Cardin declared, "has played both ends against the middle for a long time. He's smart. I used to think I was smart, too, but every time I tried to pin something on him, something big enough to flatten him, he left me waiting for a streetcar." A note of bitterness crept into the dick's voice, and he scowled at his liquor as though it displeased him. "This time, though, he's done. He was too smart for his own good. Murder is bad business, D.A."

"He swears we'll never convict him"
"He's whistling past a graveyard."

"I wonder, Cardin. We've tried so many times before; come so close. Always, at the last minute, he's had something up his sleeve."

Jeff Cardin finished his drink, set the glass down gently and rolled his head around to give the District Attorney a steady stare. "Cottrell's only out this time," he said, "is me. I saw this kill. I saw it with my own two eyes, and as long as I'm alive to tell a jury what I saw, he's finished. And," Cardin added grimly, "I figure to be alive."

The D.A. nodded, thumbed the switch on the projector and snapped out the lights. A rectangle of light leaped onto the silver screen at the end of the room. The D.A. sank into a chair beside Cardin and said softly, "This is going to make you hate the snow and sleet, if I know my daughter."

He was wrong. The picture that flashed on the screen was not of any sun-baked Florida beach, with breaking surf and gorgeous females. It was so dark, so shadowy at first, that Jeff Cardin had to stare for a moment before making out what it was. Then he saw that it was the interior of a shack.

He saw a bare board floor, a few straight backed chairs, a crude table on which stood beer bottles and glasses. The light was bad. The general effect was one of sordidness and squalor.

"Your daughter must have gone swimming," Cardin muttered.

The District Attorney did not answer. Another end of the shadowy room was visible now, and both men leaned forward. Cardin caught his breath noisily. He was staring at the D.A.'s daughter, and a cold chill was crawling through him.

Something was wrong here, or else Lois Lake had a strange, twisted sense of humor. The girl sat stiffly in a chair, her ankles bound to its legs with strips of white stuff that looked like adhesive tape. Her arms were fastened behind her in a position that must have been excruciatingly painful, indeed, the pain showed in her face.

She seemed to be biting her lips in an effort to keep from crying out.

Jeff Cardin pushed himself erect and stood with his legs spread wide, his fists clenched. "What is this?"

"I—I don't know," Lake whispered.

It was a color film, but aside from the soft blue of Lois Lake's dress and the copper sheen of her beautifully groomed hair, there was no color in it. There was only the brown floor and the brown wall filling in a dismal background for the girl's suffering.

The projector whirred on. Foot after foot of the film showed the girl sitting there, showed the pain and torment in her lovely face. Then abruptly the scene changed.

It was a close-up now, and the lighting was better, the picture was almost professional. A small, pot-bellied stove filled the screen. Its door hung open; the bed of coals inside glowed red. The shiny handle of a poker protruded.

A hand appeared in the picture. A man's hand. It closed over the poker. The fingers curled evilly, caressingly, and then slowly pulled the poker from the coals, the curved, pointed end of it red-hot.

The scene changed again. The drab brown wall was back, and the chair, and the District Attorney's daughter. But now the red end of the poker intruded, hovering over the girl's head. For a moment it hung there before moving across the screen toward her eyes.

Like a terrified bird fascinated by the swaying head of a snake, the girl watched that hot iron. It moved toward her eyes and she cringed from it, struggling frantically to free herself. Her mouth was open, screaming, and to Jeff Cardin the scream was so real it almost ruptured his ear-drums.

Sweat broke out on Cardin's contorted face. His chest heaved with his breathing. He was no longer aware of his surroundings; he was not in the District Attorney's game-room now, but inside the sordid shack in the picture. A deep, low sound rumbled in his throat and he took a step forward.

The scene changed again. A sheet of white paper filled the screen now. White paper tacked to a wall and covered with a crudely lettered message. It was a message for the D.A.

THIS IS JUST A WARNING. IT WILL GIVE YOU AN IDEA OF WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF SYD COTTRELL IS CONVICTED. TURN COTTRELL LOOSE AND YOU'LL GET YOUR DAUGHTER BACK OKAY TRY TO MAKE TROUBLE FOR US AND YOU'LL NEVER SEE HER ALIVE AGAIN

That was all but it hung there on the screen for an eternity, hurling its defiance. It hung there until Jeff Cardin, face twisted with rage, lurched forward with curled fingers outstretched, as though to tear the offending threat down by sheer force. Then, abruptly the screen was blank and the end of the film rattled in the projector.

In a daze, Lake turned the machine off and groped for a light switch. He looked old. His face was ghastly. Staring at Cardin, he said in a thick, strangled voice "They've done it . . . done it again, Cardin. My own daughter . . ." Trembling, he sank into a

chair and covered his face with his hands.

JEFF CARDIN was in no mood just then to show pity. His nails had dug into the palms of his hands, and the cords of his neck stood out white with tension. He had been a city dick a long time, had seen crime in many guises. This particular method of extortion was a new one, and Cardin's heart was black with hate for the fiends who had conceived it.

For some time he stared mutely at the blank screen, then he turned, sent a withering glare at the D.A. and snapped, "Tears won't help. Lake Your daughter's in danger!"

The D.A. looked up at him in anguish. "They'll kill her, Cardin . . ."

"Not until they've taken more pictures," Cardin muttered. "This sort of thing calls for a follow-up." He strode the length of the room and picked up the paper in which the box of film had been wrapped. "You sure this is your daughter's handwriting?"

"I'm—positive, Cardin."

"They forced her to write it then, to cover themselves." Cardin glanced at the postmark. "Mailed in West Palm Beach, two days ago," he said tersely, "which doesn't mean a thing I could go down there and try to find out who developed this film. That wouldn't be too hard, maybe, but the chances are it wasn't done commercially. They wouldn't run the risk. If Cottrell's back of this, there won't be any foolish blunders, damn him."

He was talking more to himself than for Lake's benefit, and Lake merely stared at him. Cardin in turn stared at the paper. It was addressed, he noticed, to Mr. Paul Lake, Room 813, Turner Building. Lois Lake had a trick of half printing her words, half writ-

ing them. Jeff Cardin had a trick of noticing such things.

'Let's see that film again,' Cardin said. 'If it's too much for you, I'll see it alone—but we can't take a chance of overlooking anything.'

The D.A. stood up and made an attempt to pull himself together. He succeeded, but his face was still colorless, his lips purple where he had bitten them. 'There's got to a way out of this,' he said mechanically. 'Got to be.' He turned the projector on and rewound the film. Then, once more, he and Jeff Cardin sat in the darkened game-room and stared in silence at the latest hole-card of Sydney Cottrell.

THREE was a second package next day, but this time Jeff Cardin did not carry it into the D.A.'s office, he was there when it arrived. His face dark with anticipation of evil, he broke the string.

'Your daughter's handwriting again, Lake?"

'Yes,' Lake said mechanically.

Cardin removed a metal box, opened it and took out a reel of film. He held it to the light and unwound a few feet of it, peering at the tiny images on the celluloid; then he put the film back, scowled at the District Attorney and said tersely, 'Let's go to your house and have a look at this.'

Paul Lake had pulled himself together since last night. He seemed resigned now and bitter, and his jaw had a determined thrust to it.

On the way over, he said, 'This puts me in a difficult spot Cardin. If you were in such a spot what would you do?"

'I'd go to Florida,' Cardin growled, and get my daughter!"

"And if you failed in that? If you failed to find her . . .?"

"I don't know," Cardin said. He honestly didn't. No man could answer such a question unless confronted with an actual situation. It made Cardin think of a question he had seen once on some sort of examination or quiz sheet. 'If you were a soldier, standing in a trench with hundreds of your companions and awaiting the signal to go over the top . . . and a grenade fell at your feet, about to explode . . . what would you do? Would you run, hoping to save yourself, or would you fall on the grenade and smother the explosion with your body thereby saving the lives of your companions at the sacrifice of your own?

Such questions, Cardin maintained, were meaningless. A man might say what he *thought* he would do, and then, when faced with actualities, do something else entirely.

No man could answer the D.A.'s problem. It was for Lake himself to make the decision.

"I don't know, either," Lake muttered. "I love my daughter, Cardin. She's all I have left. If anything happens to her it will probably finish me. But . . . I have a job to do. Cottrell is a fiend, and if I turn him loose to prey on society again, I'll be worse than a murderer. It's a frightful thing to decide."

"Wait," Cardin said, "until we see this latest reel of pictures."

They descended to Lake's big game-room, and the D.A. closed the Venetian blinds at the windows to shut out the morning sunlight. His grayness seemed to return as the room turned gray around him, his hands shook a little as he fumbled with the projector. 'I'm not sure I can stand this, Cardin,' he mumbled. 'If it's like the other one . . ."

It was quite like the other one. The pictures had been taken in the same

sordid shack. This time, however, the table was cluttered with playing cards and chips instead of beer bottles and there was an overcoat draped over one of the chairs.

The girl sat where she had sat before, her arms and legs bound, her slim body slumped forward, in fatigue, as much as her bonds would permit. Pale sunlight slanted across her, brightening the warm red of her dress, but her face was in shadow and seemed older, more lined with torment.

As in the other firm, nothing happened at first. Then the scene shifted, not this time to portray the pot-bellied stove and red-hot poker but to show a small, rectangular cage.

Two thin rats, their eyes red and evil, slunk back and forth, back and forth, behind the wire mesh that imprisoned them. No caption was needed to stress the fact that they were famished. A hand appeared, slowly pushing a piece of bread along the floor. The rats eyed it. The hand withdrew, leaving the bread inches from the cage.

The starved rats hurled themselves again and again at the wall of their prison, in frenzied efforts to reach the food.

The scene changed abruptly.

Jeff Cardin sent a quick, searching glance at the District Attorney, and in the half-light reflected from the screen he saw that the D.A.'s lips were twitching, his hands white and stiff on the arms of his chair.

The girl was back in the picture now. Her eyes were enormous with terror, and she was staring at something not yet visible to Cardin and the D.A. She screamed. This time, however, Cardin did not wince as the girl's lips parted; he was leaning forward, frowning.

The cage of famished rats appeared in

the lower left corner of the picture and moved slowly along the floor. At the same time, a shadowy shape, his back to the camera, sidled onto the screen and knelt in front of the girl, removing her shoes and stockings. The man did not turn, his face was not once revealed. When he sidled out of the picture, he took Lois Lake's shoes and stockings with him, and the girl's feet gleamed white as wax against the murky shadows beneath her chair.

The cage continued its forward progress. It was being pushed, with a stick, by someone not in the picture. It came to rest only a few inches from the girl's feet.

She screamed, and the camera caught a brief, dramatic close-up of the terror etched in her twisted face. Then the camera concerned itself only with her feet.

She had drawn her legs back as far as the chair-rungs would permit. The cage was horribly close to them. The thin, red-eyed, half-starved things in the cage tore savagely at the wire mesh, and at each other, as they fought to reach food.

Jeff Cardin stood up, his chest swelled with a noisy, indrawn breath. The District Attorney voiced a low moaning sound.

Then the scene changed, and once more the screen was filled with a crudely lettered message.

THERE ARE MANY WAYS A GIRL
CAN DIE, D.A. SOME ARE EASY
AND SOME ARE NOT. FIGURE IT
OUT FOR YOURSELF WHICH WAY
SHE DIES IF COTTRELL IS CON-
VICTED. TURN COTTRELL LOOSE,
GIVE HIM FORTY EIGHT HOURS TO
MAKE A CLEAN BREAK, AND YOUR
DAUGHTER WILL BE RETURNED TO
YOU UNHARMED. IF NOT, THE

RATS MAY GET FED THIS MAY BE
YOUR LAST WARNING

That ended it.

Jeff Cardin did not ask to have this film shown to him again. When the projector was turned off and the blinds opened, he sat in grim silence, sucking unlighted cigarette. Finally he said, "Well, Lake?"

"They're fiends!" the District Attorney whispered. "They—they're not human, Cardin!"

"No one ever accused Cottrell's mob of being human. You want me to grab a plane for Florida? You want me to work on this?"

"I—don't know."

"I don't, either," Cardin confessed. "They hold all the cards. At the most, we have only a couple of days, and the chances of finding your daughter in that short time are about a thousand to one. Furthermore, if I go down there and they find out what I'm up to, they may kill her!" He took the cigarette from his lips, gazed steadily at Lake for a moment and added, "They may kill her anyway. You realize that, don't you?"

The D A. nodded, biting his lip.

"Both these films," Cardin went on, his voice heavy and thoughtful, "were mailed in West Palm Beach. The chances are she was picked up there and taken to some shack not far off—but finding that shack would be like hunting the proverbial needle. There's a lot of wasteland in that neck of the woods, a lot of wild country, and then the Everglades." He shook his head resignedly. "As for this camera business, she probably had her camera with her when she was snatched, and that gave them the idea. Anyone can run a movie camera the way they make them these days."

The D A. was silent. The whole room was silent. The sunlight, slanting through the Venetian blinds, formed a prison-bar pattern on the floor, reminding Jeff Cardin that Public Enemy Number One, Syd Cottrell, was undoubtedly chuckling behind his prison bars at this very moment.

"Well, D A.?"

"I . . . I don't know what to do," Lake said wearily. "My God, Cardin, I can't accede to their demands! If I let Cottrell go now, everyone will think . . ." He shuddered. There were tears in his eyes.

"John Q. Public," Cardin said, "is a pretty sympathetic guy, all things considered. He'll understand, if you show these pictures to explain why you did it."

"Would you turn that monster loose, Cardin?"

Thoughtfully Cardin said, "It's your only hope. We haven't time to organize a fight." He reached for his hat. "I'm going to have words with Cottrell. There's one little thing ought to be cleared up before he goes free. See you later, in your office."

SYD COTTRELL looked up from a languid scrutiny of his fingernails when the door of his cell clicked shut behind Cardin. He looked Cardin over with studied indifference, then resumed his nail inspection and carefully dug out a bit of dirt that offended him. He knew Cardin. No introduction was needed.

Jeff Cardin sat down and said softly, "So you had a hole card after all, mister?"

Cottrell smiled.

The smile of Syd Cottrell was not exactly a beautiful thing, or a pleasant one. There was evil in Cottrell's face. This man was not just an ordinary

killer, he enjoyed his role and had an amazing ingenuity for it. The brain behind those smallish eyes was razor-sharp, and never yet, in an encounter with the law, had it come out second best.

Partially bald, with a round, soft face and a round, soft body, Cottrell did not look intelligent, but he was.

"The D.A.," Cardin said darkly, "has received two reels of film. Will there be more?"

"I wouldn't know," Cottrell said.

"You have some smart men working for you, Cottrell!"

"They obey orders."

"There's just one flaw. Those pictures might have been made some time ago, for all I know or the D.A. knows. Pictures keep. The girl may be dead by now."

Cottrell gave the city dick a long, steady stare and finally shrugged his shoulders. "That's an angle, Flatfoot."

"An important angle—for you," Cardin said. "The D.A. is no fool, Cottrell. He knows you and knows what you're capable of. Before this little scheme of yours pays dividends, the D.A. wants proof that his daughter is still alive."

That particular line of attack might have troubled an ordinary man. Cottrell was not ordinary. He scowled a little, then appeared to be amused. His smile came back and was more snug, more self-assured, than before.

"That's his problem, not mine, Cardin."

"I think it's yours."

"No." Cottrell slowly shook his head. "The girl may still be alive or she may not be. That's my little secret. The point is, Cardin, the D.A. will go through with this, proof or no proof. She may be alive. There's always that chance. If he refuses to do

business, she *won't* be—and that's no chance at all, that's certainty." A little laugh rattled deep in Cottrell's throat and he resumed his inspection of his nails. "You're wasting your time here, Flatfoot."

"Is there anything," Cardin muttered, "to prevent our picking you up again after you're released?"

"The girl stays where she is, Flatfoot," Cottrell shrugged "until I'm safe out of here."

"And then?"

"You may have a little trouble locating me."

"You know all the answers, Cottrell."

The killer laughed again. For a man who faced a murder charge, he appeared to have no fears of the future. "It takes brains, Flatfoot," he said softly. "That's what I have—brains. That's why you're always behind my private eight-ball."

Jeff Cardin stood up and rapped on the cell door for the jailer to come.

There was another film in the mail the following morning. Once more Cardin and the District Attorney went to the D. A.'s house and ran it off.

This time Lois Lake was not tied to a chair. She had been moved, and was bound now to the end of a bed. The light was bad in the new prison-room, but the girl's sweater and skirt were obviously disheveled, one stocking hung loose and limp about her ankle. Except for her hair, which caught what little light there was and reflected it in a coppery glow that was truly beautiful, she looked ghastly.

The threat this time was of fire. A hand pushed a pile of rags against the girl's feet and held a match above them. Held it there for a moment, then withdrew it. Then the message flashed on the screen.

WE WON'T BE SENDING ANY MORE PICTURES, D.A. THIS IS THE LAST YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO.

Back in the District Attorney's office, Jeff Cardin sucked a cold cigarette and said bitterly, "There's only one answer, Lake Turn him loose. Maybe, with luck, we'll be able to pick him up again after your daughter has been returned."

The D.A. looked almost as ghastly as his daughter. He no longer made any attempt to maintain his composure or to keep up appearances. His hands shook, his face was gray and drawn; his clothes were so shapeless that he must have slept in them—if, indeed, he had been able to sleep at all.

"You know what people will say, Cardin," he said brokenly.

"To hell with what people say! You've your daughter to think of!"

The D.A. slowly nodded, as though his head weighed a ton. "Then . . . I'll turn Cottrell loose . . . tonight. God help me, there's no other way out."

There was no brass band awaiting Syd Cottrell when he emerged from captivity. It was a dark night with rain in the air, the streets were black and wet. With topcoat drawn snugly about his fat frame and the brim of his hat pulled down to hide his face, Public Enemy Number One walked down the steps from City Jail, paused on the sidewalk to light a cigarette, then turned left along Munroe Street.

He headed for the cab stand at the corner, stepped up to the only cab parked there at the moment and said crisply, "The railroad station, buddy." He got in and the cab rolled through the rain.

Cottrell leaned back and permitted himself a slow smile of triumph. Now and then, as the cab bore him across

town through light traffic, he chuckled to himself. "Saps," he said softly. "That's what they are. Saps."

The cab stopped. Cottrell got out, pushed a dollar bill at the driver and turned away. He hurried into the station.

The driver did a peculiar thing. Instead of moving on to hunt up another fare, he left his cab standing there and followed his passenger. Not boldly but furtively, with a technique acquired only through year of training and experience. Jeff Cardin prided himself on the fact that he could tail anything that walked, despite crowds, floods or subways.

He was surprised, though, when Cottrell stepped up to a ticket window. Frowning a little under the day-old mustache that gave him a measure of disguise, he watched while the killer bought and paid for a ticket to some unknown destination. Something, he told himself, was wrong.

It was right again almost immediately. Cottrell, after moving around in a clever effort to discover whether or not he was being tailed, headed finally for the men's room.

When he emerged by another door, Jeff Cardin was waiting to take up the pursuit.

Cottrell left the station by a side exit and was in no hurry to flag another cab. He walked, despite the rain, for a half dozen long blocks. Now and then he stopped to peer into store windows, and once he stepped into barroom, had a drink, and carefully looked around before stepping out again.

Obviously he did not want to be followed. Obviously, too, he half expected to be. But Jeff Cardin was merely a blur in the background and did nothing to give himself away.

COTTRELL walked to Atlantic Street and descended into the subway. When he boarded a train, Cardin moved in with him—at the other end of the car. When he got off, Cardin got off.

They were in the warehouse district now, near the waterfront. The rain had stopped. A biting wind rode in off the harbor, bringing fish smells. Cottrell moved into the rain, walking more slowly now, and in a district so deserted, so empty of sound, Cardin's job was infinitely harder.

The city dick hung back and let the distance widen between himself and his quarry. It widened too much. All at once Cottrell vanished!

Cardin cursed his luck, covered the distance in a hurry and found himself confronted with a problem. There were two doors in the long wooden building into which Cottrell had disappeared. The killer might have used either. The building itself was, or had been, a packing house, its windows now were boarded up, and a huge FOR SALE sign draped the front of it.

The street was dark. The building was dark. From a distant through street came muffled sounds of traffic, but here there was no sound.

Cardin tried the doors. Both were locked.

He found an alley and went down it to a loading platform, climbed onto the platform to reach one of the boarded windows. Very carefully he worked his fingers under a board, braced a foot against the wall of the building, and tugged. The board came loose with a low cracking sound.

Cardin climbed through the aperture and dropped softly to the floor inside, amid darkness thick as tar.

He paused, listening. The building had four floors, and Cottrell was on

one of them, somewhere, but here no sound intruded, the place was a tomb. Forced to use a flashlight lest he trip over unseen obstacles in the dark, Cardin cupped the tiny glow of a fountain-pen flash in his hand and went forward slowly, seeking a staircase.

He found one at the front of the building and went up it, testing each tread before trusting it with his weight. This took time. Impatience urged him to greater speed, but the famous Cardin caution held him back. He was passing a second-floor window when, through chunks in the boards that covered it, he saw the headlights of a car swinging into the street outside.

He stopped, pressed his face close to the window and watched. The car stopped across the street and its lights were instantly extinguished. A dark shape stepped out of it, hesitated a moment as though uncertain of the surroundings, or afraid of them, then hurried across the street to the packing-house and disappeared from Cardin's line of vision.

He heard a door open beneath him, heard it close again. There were footsteps on the stairs.

Cardin stepped back into absolute darkness, flattened himself against a wall and waited. A nervous glow of light, winking on and off at intervals of a few seconds, came creeping up the stairs toward him. It missed him, and the fellow went past. Cardin got a look at his face and smiled grimly.

He'd been right, he knew now.

The fellow climbed to the floor above—the third floor—and was greeted there by a voice that boomed hollowly, eerily through the empty building. The words themselves were not distinguishable, they ran together in a blur of reverberation, and were lost in echoes.

Cardin returned his flashlight to his

pocket, slipped his gun from its harness and started up the stairs. He went slowly, in darkness so thick it strangled him. He could not trust the railing for guidance, in places it had rotted away. Nor could he trust the stairs themselves, without carefully feeling each one out before putting his feet down.

An eternity passed before he reached the top. Then, in a half crouch, he stared through a vast, empty void of darkness toward a yellow glow at the far end of a large room. The glow emanated from an electric lantern resting on the floor. It showed him three men. Syd Cottrell was one of them.

"One hundred grand," Cottrell was saying. "That's right, isn't it? One hundred thousand fish. That's a lot of money, pal, but Cottrell pays his debts. What the hell, there's plenty more where this came from." He turned to the man on his right, a short, dumpy man sitting on an upturned box. "Let's have it, Rucke."

The dumpy man pulled a package from his coat pocket and said, "I'm tickled to get rid of it, boss. Lugged a hundred grand around in this man's town ain't my idea of any picnic."

Jeff Cardin straightened out of his crouch and inched forward.

He was still in no hurry. The no-man's-land between him and his quarry seemed endless, and he hugged the only available protection—a wall of empty cardboard cartons, man high which afforded shelter for part of the distance. For safety's sake he stooped and removed his shoes.

All at once, behind him, a light stabbed through the dark and a voice croaked, "Hold it, you! One move and—"

Jeff Cardin took the only out. His brain flashed a warning that meek surrender would be no solution. Being

trapped in this rat's nest at this particular time meant just one thing: death—and Cottrell would gloat hungrily while dishing it out. Cardin flung himself sideways into the wall of boxes.

He went through the wall like a circus rider through a paper hoop. Boxes tumbled down about him and he rolled with them, under them. The man with the light began shooting, but Cardin was no simple target and the room was full of a racket that wrecked the fellow's aim.

On one knee, with the wall of boxes in a grotesque mound around him, Cardin returned the fire. The flashlight fell from twitching fingers, hit the floor and rolled. Its owner sagged to his knees. Cardin whirled, took snap aim at the lantern, fired twice and shattered it, while two of the three men grouped at that end of the room threw lead at him.

He was enjoying himself. His eyes glittered, his nostrils flared like those of a racehorse in the stretch. On hands and knees he wormed along behind the barricade of boxes, firing back at the spurts of flame.

It was an eerie situation. Except for the flashlight, which lay on the floor and poured a lane of light at nothing in particular, the room was black as the inside of a coffin. Thunder rolled in it, and the empty building took up the storm of sound, amplified it, distorted it, kept it alive in continuous echoes. Cardin thought grimly of his war-months in the front line trenches, in France. A smile bared his teeth.

HE KICKED a box with his foot and it was riddled instantly with bullets. Sprawled on his stomach, Cardin threw lead at the flashes and grunted with satisfaction when a shrill scream of pain split the no-man's-land in front of him.

He fired again, rolling with the shot to avoid an answering rain of lead. A voice cursed him, and there was fear in the voice. Cardin's heart warmed. He, Jeff Cardin, had put fear into the soul of the nation's number one killer. He thumbed a new clip into his automatic, and the gesture was almost a caress.

His voice rang out, "All right, Cottrell! Come and get it!" He stood up.

The shot missed him. It was close—it ripped through the pile of boxes and sent them shivering—but it missed. The automatic leaped in Cardin's fist, and a sudden stumbling sound accompanied the staccato blasts from the gun's muzzle.

Syd Cottrell staggered across the room, moaning. He lurched drunkenly into the lane of light thrown by the flashlight on the floor. Both hands were pressed to his face and blood ran through his fingers. He walked in a weird circle, fell against the wall and collapsed.

Then a terrified voice wailed from the darkness, "Stop it, Cardin! My God, stop it! I—I surrender . . ."

Cardin drew a slow, deep breath. He felt tired. "Walk over to the light," he said wearily.

There were slow, faltering footsteps from the far end of the room, audible now because the echoes of the gunfire had at last whispered to silence. Into the flashlight's glow, as into the dim light of an execution chamber, stepped the man whose car was parked on the street outside. The District Attorney, Paul Lake.

Cardin stepped forward, prepared for any mad move the man might make. But the D.A. was finished. Despair dulled his eyes and he offered no resistance as Cardin put handcuffs on him. The pallor on his gaunt face was not faked now, as when he had sat with

Cardin in the game-room, watching the extortion pictures. It was real and it was ghastly.

Jeff Cardin pushed him against the wall, held him there at gun-point, and knelt to look at Cottrell. He hoped Cottrell was not dead. He hoped the man would live to be returned to the death-house.

A quick inspection showed him that the killer *would* live to face the chair. Satisfied, Cardin straightened up, pushed the D.A. toward the stairs. The flashlight of Cottrell's dead henchman—in Cardin's big fist—lighted the way for them.

Half way down the stairs, the D.A. suddenly stopped, turned, said desperately, "I have a hundred thousand dollars. Cardin. It's yours—all of it, yours—if—if . . ."

The city dick curled his lips. "One hundred grand blood-money for turning loose a killer. Keep it," he snarled.

"But . . ."

Cardin menaced him with a fist and the D.A. cringed, whimpering. He had nothing more to say until they were out of the packing-house in his own car, with Cardin at the wheel. Then, completely broken, he stared at his manacled hands and muttered, "I don't see how you knew, Cardin. The pictures were Cottrell's idea to give me an out. He planned the whole thing. Cottrell never makes mistakes . . ."

"This time," Cardin snapped, "he made one. They always do, these smart killers."

"But I don't see . . ."

"Your daughter," Cardin said grimly. "When a girl is snatched, Lake—actually snatched and taken to a filthy hole such as was pictured in those films of yours—she doesn't take along a hairdresser and a suitcase. Take another look at those films sometime. Maybe the

warden will let you rig up a projector in your cell." He swung the car out of the warehouse district, onto a through street that led north to Police Headquarters. "For a girl who was being kicked around and mistreated, your daughter did pretty well for herself

Her hair stayed immaculate, and she changed her dress three times. The first time she wore blue, next red, finally a sweater and skirt." Cardin's low laugh was mirthless.

"We all make mistakes," he said softly.

Cipher Solvers' Club for February, 1940

(Continued from June 1st issue)

Eighteen—Alabama, Montgomery, Ala. Alice L. Anderson, Great Falls, Mont. "Los Ang., Los Angeles, Calif." Mrs. W. C. Bird, San Francisco, Calif. †Buddy, Baltimore, Md. Cagliostro, New York N. Y. †Curio, Pittsburgh, Pa. †Drinkwater, San Francisco, Calif. †Docker Shawnee, Okla. "Ebsie," Hampton, Va. †Rodney Endor Detroit, Mich. †LeRoy A. Guidry Slidell, La. "Dr. S. F. Heigrock, Glenco, Ill. †Rich Hill Richmond Hill, N. Y. †Bert Hilton, Wilmington, Calif. "J. C. K. Gary Ind." †Lard, Hayward, Wis. Victor Lunt, Steubenville, Ohio †Norman, Chicago, Ill. †Pran, New York N. Y. Frank Rummel, Maspeth, N. Y. †C. H. Spencer, Washington, D. C. Thistledown State

College, Pa.

Seventeen—†A. R. E., New York, N. Y. †Mrs. Archie Hill, Wausau, Wis. †Lucky Brooklyn, N. Y. †Nip, Saltville, Va. Mutt & Nutt, Jamestown, N. Y. Renard, Dallas, Tex. †Irving S. Sherman, Brooklyn, N. Y. †Ubez, Jackson, Mich.

Sixteen—F. H. D., Jamaica, N. Y. †D. H. Holcomb, Fort Myers, Fla. †A. H. L., Springfield, Ohio. †Nap, Sacramento, Calif. †James H. O'Neil, Indianapolis, Ind. Rojano, Worcester, Mass. †John T. Straiger, Brooklyn, N. Y. †Wash., San Diego, Calif.

Fifteen—†Myrtle Lee Bunn, Arlington, Va. †Mrs. Robert De Noyelles, New York, N. Y.

(Continued on page 94)

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"You drill him for me and I'll bump the other guy for you," was Slick's idea of homicidal perfection

Stand-in for a Kill

By Stuart Towne

GREENWICH VILLAGE is dotted with night clubs like a giraffe is with spots. One of them, *The Club Casino*, is a curious place in which the glamour girls and boys of Café Society rub shoulders with the underworld's Four Hundred.

You might, for instance, see Dorothy Leland, heiress to the Bubble soap mil-

lions with Bob Carroll, movie star, the smoothie of the screen whose every smile causes a million palpitations in as many feminine hearts. They are having champagne at four times too much per bottle. At the next table, if you know your way around, you'll recognize Four Ace Harry and The Indiana Kid taking their Scotch straight and ordering

Old Fashioneds for their molls, a couple of successful gals who have retired from the hat check racket

The drinks at the Casino are good but expensive, the food is passable, the service is tops and the floor show is the last word in something or other. A lazy costume designer's idea of heaven is creating clothes for the *Club Casino's* chorus; there are weeks when he wouldn't put pen to paper except to endorse his pay check.

Over in one corner you'll see a squint-eyed heavy weight gorilla in a tux that bulges suspiciously here and there; his tailor didn't make sufficient allowance for the presence of two .45 automatics. Behind him is a small inconspicuous door opening on a stairway to the floor above. If you have a damn good reason, you might get past the gorilla, and if you did, you'd discover that the stairs led to the offices of Mischa and Isaac Levin, owners of the *Club Casino*. And a couple of very smooth articles they are, too.

Along the Main Stem they are known for a certain reason as Mike and Ike. They are as unpopular personally as their Club is popular. It may be because of that little business rule of theirs, namely, "Me first." Or it may be because certain whispered rumors about blackmail and the double-cross have some foundation, though we wouldn't want to come right out and say so in print—not as long as that gorilla in his bulgy tux is on their payroll.

In the office on a certain recent night when things happened, there was a blonde lovely who had been admitted by the gorilla for the good reason that she was Mrs. Levin. It is true that she didn't have the papers to prove it, but, all things considered, that was all she lacked. She sat in the chair before the big desk and regarded her long red

fingernails nervously. She spoke to the little hard eyed man who sat across from her stripping the tinfoil from a long Havana cigar he had taken from the crystal humidor on the desk.

"I don't like it, darling," she said flatly. "You'll have to admit that it was a little bit raw. And quite unnecessary. Do you have to ask for trouble?"

The man picked up a gold desk lighter and applied it to his cigar. When he got it going to his satisfaction, he said, "Listen, baby I took care of myself all right for a long time before you came along. And I can do my own deciding about what is necessary and what isn't. So skip it."

THE girl got up. "Okay," she said. "But I still don't like it. I'll see you downstairs." She turned toward the door.

The man's back was toward the window as he stood up. His eyes watched her with a possessive pride. Then he turned and looked out the window, down on VanMorton Street. "You're losing your nerve, kid," he said. "There isn't a trigger man in town who could get past the boys downstairs. And that small-time chiseler hasn't got the guts to—"

The sound of the gun was a small distant pop like a boy's cap pistol. But the dark round hole that appeared in the window pane as if by magic and the surprised scream that came from the man as his hands clutched at his stomach were real enough. He swayed on his feet for a long moment and then fell backward on the desk top. His head struck a silver water carafe that toppled, fell, and hit the floor. A thin trickle of broken glass came from its inside as it rolled across the carpet. Following it across the smooth shiny-topped desk came a dark red flow of moving liquid.

The girl in the doorway screamed.

Back in the dark behind an open window of the empty office building across the street a dark figure, gun in hand, moved silently. Almost before the girl's scream reached him he was gone.

Eight minutes later when a few of the patrons of the *Club Casino* were beginning to wonder why so many people were disappearing through the small door in the corner, Slick Perona was six blocks away, hastily moving upward on the fire escape of the Claymore Hotel. Near the top he stopped, looked down once, and then carefully swung himself over the iron railing. He kept his eyes up now, and, after a short moment's hesitation, edged sideways, his back to the wall, out across the narrow ledge on the building's face. He tried hard to keep his mind on that open window fifteen feet away. He knew that a hard cement areaway pavement lay down there beyond the ends of his toes in the darkness, fourteen stories of thin air away. But he refused to think about that.

Finally, when he had hooked a gloved hand in at the window and pulled himself across the sill, he let himself breathe again. He looked back toward the neon glow of light that marked the street where a man's dead body lay sprawled across a desk in the offices of *The Club Casino*. A taut smile cut across his sharp face and his bright, hard, gray eyes laughed.

"That'll give the cops something to chew on," he said to himself. "A nice tough something."

Slick turned, snapped the light switch on and quickly threw off his clothes. He got into half a pair of pajamas and phoned at the same time, holding the receiver between a hunched shoulder and his ear. He told the desk to send up a bellhop. Then he threw back the bed-

covers and roughed them up as if someone had been lying there.

When the boy opened the door, Slick walked across the room, one hand to his head. He timed it so that he got a quick glimpse down the corridor to the left. He threw a quarter at the bellhop.

"Get me something for a headache," he said, his voice impatient and irritable.

The boy nodded and closed the door. Slick grinned widely. He had seen one door down the corridor that was just slightly ajar. That had told him all he wanted to know. The dick was still on the job. He had been on Slick's tail all day, glued there like a postage stamp.

He had popped up out of nowhere that morning less than half an hour after Slick had propositioned Chicago Pinky on a proposed job of grand larceny. Pinky, a stool pigeon whose days were numbered because it was getting around, didn't know that Slick had a short story writer's or a con man's talent for fiction.

Even if he had, why should he suspect that Slick would actually want a copper nosing around? That wouldn't have made sense to Pinky at all. And Slick was pretty sure it wouldn't even make sense to Lieutenant Church who was about as smart as dicks come. Slick didn't think that was so smart anyway, and certainly not smart enough for this caper.

BUT Slick had a very good reason for wanting a gumshoe on his tail. The dick was going to come in very handy as a witness to the fact that Slick Perona was in bed with one hell of a hang-over at just the time when somebody put a slug in Mike Levin. It wasn't the world's best alib, all by itself. But there was more to it than that. And it added up. Two and two and two make six. Slick was a great guy for figuring things out.

He'd doped all the angles on this one with a couple to boot. He'd left no clues on the scene of the crime simply because he hadn't been on the scene of the crime. He'd fired from the window across the street and he'd lammed without being seen.

The gun had been dropped in a sewer two blocks away and in the wrong direction. Even if the dicks should cop a million to one shot and fish it up, they couldn't trace it to Slick. He'd bought it from a respectable fence whose flourishing business had been built on the motto "We never squeal."

He'd left no fingerprints, naturally; he wasn't a punk. And he knew no one had noticed him in the streets; he hadn't worked with a whiz mob for five years or so and not learned how to make himself inconspicuous even in broad daylight.

The coppers had a dead man and a slug. That was all. What was going to give pain to them was that one big thing they didn't have—a motive. That sewed it up and put it away. They'd have a hell of a job even trying to frame a connection between Shek and Mike Levin.

MURDER is easy," Slick had told Bo Gonman "if a guy just uses his head. I've made a study of it, Bo, and the hard cases for the Homicide boys to crack are the ones there don't seem to be no good reason for. No motive means trouble . . . for the D. A. And that's where you come in. You'd like to see Mike Levin pushin' up daisies. Am I right?"

"Maybe yes. Maybe no," Bo said cautiously. He was a man of few words and none of them ever committed him very far. He scowled at Slick interestedly, but puzzled.

"Well you've got plenty of reason,"

Slick said. "He gave you a nice piece of nothing on that last job, and you'd have bumped him off before now only that new D. A.'s given you the jitters like he has a lot of dopes."

"Yeah," Bo said. "Except you, I suppose. Never mind the cracks. Get on with it. So far it smells. What's biting you?"

Slick lit a new cigarette off the old one. "It's like this, Bo. I'm in the same spot. Mischa's brother, Ike, is gunning for me on account of a little something we don't need to go into. But I'm going to get him first. And without sticking my neck out either. What makes it tough is that those Center Street clowns know way too damn much. Just let Ike Levin only stub his fat toe and headquarters is down on me like a tent."

"Well, so what?" Bo was sarcastic. "Want me to do it for you, maybe?"

"Right in one," Slick grinned. "How'd you guess?"

Bo got up to leave. "You're slap happy."

"Wait, Bo." Slick held his arm. "Listen. It's easy as—well as dating one of the chorus dolls in the *Club Casino*. And safer. You get Ike for me and I'll get brother Mike for you. See? We leave the dicks whistling for a motive both times around. It's a natural."

Bo frowned, trying to grasp the convolutions of this masterpiece of strategy. "Oh yeah? And they sneeze me for your murder and you for mine. Easy Sure—for the cops."

Slick shrugged disgustedly. "Do I look that dumb, Bo? Use your head. The night I put a slug in Mike you can take your babe to *45*, get a table right next to Winchell's, and make a general nuisance of yourself before two hundred people. Throw spitballs at the bubble dancer or something. It's an alibi, isn't it? When Mike gets his, you'll have

witnesses by the dozen. And then, when you rub out Isaac—well, a couple of days before I'll get me a nice ten-day lag for sassin' a cop or something. Get it now?"

Bo didn't. The machinery under his hat was a bit rusty and it moved slowly with a creaking noise, but Slick was persistent.

He explained the whole scheme twice more. Eventually Bo absorbed it and, finally, after a period of simmering, the full blown beauty of the scheme, like the accumulated effect of six highballs, hit him all at once.

"Not bad, Slick, not bad," he said.

Damn. It might work at that. It's a deal . . . only just to play safe you get your—I mean *my* man first."

"Sure," Slick had agreed, pleased. "This ain't no frame."

SLICK stretched on the bed and tapped his cigarette ashes on the floor. He'd done his part and now it was up to Bo. Everything had clicked over precisely according to schedule. There was no possible chance of a slip up, no possible way . . .

A sudden sharp knock on the door erased the satisfied smile from Slick's face. He lay very still, his eyes narrowed.

And then, as suddenly, he relaxed. He had forgotten the bellhop.

"Come in," he said.

But it wasn't the boy who came through the door. It was Lieutenant Cannon and behind him, the dick from across the hall.

"Hello, Slick. Sorry to hear you're not feeling so hot. Brophy tells me you've been nursing a sick headache all evening."

"Yeah." Slick's right hand rubbed at his forehead. "And what's it to him?"

The Lieutenant saw the open window. Without answering he went directly to it and put his head out. Slick's inner nonchalance sagged.

The Lieutenant brought his head in and said, "Get your clothes on, Slick. You're going places."

"Charged with what, copper?"

"Murder. You shot Levin about a half hour ago at *The Club Casino*."

This wasn't just the way Slick had planned it, but he kept his chin up. "Like that, eh? How, if you don't mind? A trained bullet that goes around corners getting from here to there?"

"You went out that window and along the ledge. Nervy bit of work, but it's no good."

"Thanks, but I get dizzy on step-ladders. And a lot of people could get at him easier than that. Why pick on me?"

"You wouldn't kid me, would you, Slick?"

"No. Come on. Let's have it. Why would I shoot Mike Levin? I haven't got any irons in his fires."

Cannon stared at him oddly for a moment.

Then he said slowly, "Well I'll be damned!"

Breeze Connelly, a leg man from the *News*, blew in at the door just as the Lieutenant took out a pair of gleaming handcuffs.

"Well, well," he said brightly. "Looks like a promotion for somebody. That's quick work, Lieutenant. How'd you do it?"

Lieutenant Cannon twirled the handcuffs in a glittering arc around his finger and walked toward Slick, watching him closely as he answered.

"Oh, that was easy! Mike and Ike, they look alike. Smart guy, here, killed the wrong man."

The Bloody Isle

By T. T. Flynn

XV

BOTH my hands slapped on the gun and pushed the muzzle aside as a third shot blasted under my nose. The gunsmoke stung my eyes.

Swearing, he tried to hit at me and hold the gun. I'd have torn off his wrist if he hadn't let go. He reeked of whisky and his eyes were bloodshot and mean as I slugged him with the gun. If it caved his skull, so much the better. For all I knew he'd killed both Tony Wingfield and Marylin Forrester.

And I couldn't stop to look. The

guard was sober and as surprised as any of us, but he was snatching at his holster flap to draw his automatic when I whirled on him, yelling: "Stick 'em up!"

One look at me and his arms went up. From my eye corner I glimpsed a gun coming out in the hand of the other seaman. He was drunk and ready to kill too. To cover him I'd have to turn my back on the guard. All I could do was whirl fast and shoot him.

He stumbled half around, dropped the gun and caught at his side. His mouth was opening and closing mutely.



Smearred with soot and
grease, I was ready for the
big gamble.

This story began in the May 25 issue of Detective Fiction Weekly

as he started to fall. And by then I had the gun on the guard again.

"Turn around while I get that gun-belt!" I yelled.

I might have been a little out of my head too by then. This was the spark that would probably set off hell. And all I could do was see it through.

Tony Wingfield was twisting painfully on the ground. Marylin had screamed once, and now she was on her knees, crying as she spoke to him and tried to lift his head.

The girl with Bonnie had screamed too. I'd caught a glimpse of the two young men running to us. They had guts after all. I wouldn't have believed it.

The guard thought I was going to shoot when the gun jammed in his back and I reached around to unbuckle the belt.

"Don't, fer God's sake, muster! My hands is up! My hands is up!"

"Your number's up too!" I snarled as the young men reached us and the belt came away in my hand.

Past the guard I could see activity on the yacht and men starting down to the wharf. Lon had flown out to sea without noticing that there was trouble.

"Get Wingfield and Miss Forrester to the house!" I panted. "Grab that gun on the ground! I'll hold those rats on the wharf a little! Hurry!"

One more guard was at the hangar. He had started toward us, and then retreated when he saw my prisoner's hands go up. Now he sent a shot over our heads. I swung the prisoner around and fired past his side. The other guard dodged back around the corner of the hangar, apparently not sure what to do.

A group from the yacht was coming along the wharf toward the shore. The front ones stopped when I sent a bullet toward them. Out there over the water

with no cover, they made a beautiful target, even if the range was too far for accurate shooting with an automatic.

"Hurry up to the house!" I called over my shoulder, for it was plain there wasn't going to be much time. The men patrolling the island would have heard the shots. Any instant I expected the crack of a high-powered rifle or the shock of a bullet.

"Come on with me!" I ordered the guard. "Keep those hands up and don't look around!"

He formed a fair shield, for which I was grateful when I heard Bonnie's agitated voice speak behind me "Can I do anything, Holly?"

"Yes! Get back to the house where you won't stop a bullet! Have those storm shutters closed! This won't be a tea party!"

A few guns had fired futilely at us from the wharf. The men seemed to be waiting for others to come off the boat and were talking excitedly among themselves. Then a man came running and plowed through them, and I saw that it was Wolff coming to shore.

"**G**ET back there, Wolff!" I shouted, backing toward the house with my prisoner.

He answered through cupped hands "So it's you again, Barnes? By God, you're in for it now! All of you, if you don't throw those guns away and let me get to the bottom of this!"

"Your drunken scum shot one of our men! What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll settle it!" Wolff shouted. "Throw those guns away! I'm coming on shore!"

"I settled it," I said, "before he could shoot someone else! Keep your rats away from the house and we'll get along

until you leave! Send Smith to the house when he comes back!"

"I'm handling this! Are you going to do what I say?"

I looked over my shoulder to see how the others were doing. Bonnie was running to the house. Help had reached the two young men carrying Wingfield and they were rushing him across the terrace.

"Step on it!" I ordered my prisoner, and took him at a run toward the house.

Back on the wharf I could hear Wolff's angry bellow "You fools asked for it, Barnes, and you'll all get it!" He bawled to the man at the hangar to shoot, and opened fire himself. Already the crew was stringing out on a run toward the shore end of the wharf.

When Foley met us at the edge of the terrace, guns were blasting on the beach. Lead was coming close. Plaster clumps fell from the front of the house. Glass shattered in several windows.

Foley was cool enough. "So it's happened," he said, taking the prisoner's gun that I handed him. "Why d'you want this fellow?"

"He might come in handy. I want to question him."

Foley's tanned face hardened. "I'll question him. Maybe I can handle a tough one like him better than you can. I've had experience."

I didn't doubt it after marking the expression on his lean face. Artist he might be, but now suddenly he looked as dangerous as one of the big sharks his boat caught off Lower California.

Actually only a few minutes had passed between peaceful afternoon sunshine and the hell that was loose down there on the beach when the heavy front door slammed behind us.

Several of the cruise party were in the big living room. I could hear the others hurriedly closing up the house.

From a bedroom Maggie Forrester's voice ordered "Get that first aid kit, Marylin! And stop that crying or I'll slap you! I've seen worse than this many a time when I was a girl! Women in those days kept their heads!"

"B-but it was my fault!" Marylin wailed. "If I hadn't been such a fool . . ."

"Then don't be a fool now! Get the first aid kit, some hot water and help me!"

"Call me if you need me--and don't bother if you hear this fellow get noisy," Foley warned gruffly as he herded our sullen, frightened prisoner out of the room ahead of the gun.

Maggie Forrester stepped into the living room for a moment, leaning heavily on her gold-headed cane.

"I was afraid something like this would happen if I went to sleep!" she snapped at me. "What do you plan to do now, Mr. Barnes?"

"Keep them out as long as possible," I said. "They've been drinking and they'll be at our throats as fast as they can . . ."

I jumped to help one of the young men and the blonde Miss Kilbourne push a heavy divan over toward the door.

The island was in the hurricane belt. Each window had its heavy wooden shutter fastened back on hinges ready for quick closing. They were being closed now at the sides and back of the house, throwing a twilight gloom through the rooms.

Out front and on the beach and the placid cove the afternoon sun was still hot and bright. The white yacht floated motionless at the end of the wharf with all the grace and charm of a marine print.

Looking from a window I found it hard to believe that all this could be

happening to Holly Barnes and Maggie Forrester's guests.

But the men closing toward the house snapped me back to reality. More than one of them was staggering, some were shouting threats as they came on. They'd been at the yacht's liquor stores and were past all restraint now.

I knocked out a pane of glass, took aim at the nearest man and fired. And missed. And missed a second time.

Maggie Forrester's sharp voice burst out irritably at the back of the room.

"Help me with these guns! Drat being a useless old woman!"

XVI

I COULD have shouted as I jumped toward her. Two shotguns and a rifle! A box of shotgun shells and one of rifle cartridges!

"My husband's," she told me. "I've kept them in his bedroom closet just as he left them! Those thieving rascals must have overlooked the panel that hid his gun rack. These are the heaviest shot we have. There is another rifle in the rack. Now I'll see what I can do for that wounded boy."

I had the guns before she finished speaking, and picked mine as I dropped them on a table. A Winchester pumpgun, twelve gauge, that looked as if it had been carried and used a lot.

The shells had number four shot. Heavy enough. I was loading the gun as I dodged back to the window.

The young men and girls who had been closing the hurricane shutters were running inside now—and the men from the yacht were close.

Too close. My shotgun blasted in the enclosed room like a powder charge under a stump. The target screamed, dropped the revolver he was carrying and retreated in a stumbling run, claw-

ing at his face. He was moving like a blind man as I fired at the next one.

It was easier than shooting rabbits. The shot patterns couldn't miss and number four shot was large enough to be deadly.

The twin barrels of the other shotgun let go an instant later. One-two. And I fired again and stepped over a little to line the muzzle on the big hulking figure of my friend Joe, who was running toward the corner of the house.

The first string of shot stopped him, the second knocked him down. Joe crawled without his automatic for a few feet, shaking his head, and heaved up and ran for the beach with great plunging, drunken strides. I felt better as the double-barrel let go again at the other end of the room.

They'd been sure we had only a couple of small hand guns. This storm of scattering shot caught them helpless in the open. The rest had no stomach for it. They were whipped before I heard the sharper report of a rifle in the room and saw that Bonnie had snatched up the thirty-thirty and was using it.

The room stank of burnt powder. My ears were ringing as I motioned the others away from their windows.

"That ought to hold them until dark," I said. "Are all the shutters closed?"

Bonnie nodded. The rifle was unsteady in her hand but her voice was game enough. "Everything closed and the caretakers are watching at the back."

"Where's Karim?"

No one knew. I located Maggie Forrester in a bedroom. Marylin and the shallow Mrs. Kerr were helping. But it was Maggie Forrester, cane forgotten, sleeves pushed up and wrinkled hands

wet with bloody water, who was cleaning Tony Wingfield's wound.

He was conscious, pale and rocky looking, but he forced a wan smile as I entered.

"Sounded like a skeet club," he whispered.

"They were easier than skeet targets. How's the patient?"

Maggie Forrester thrust a stained towel into the basin Marylin held, and lifted antiseptic out of a metal first aid box resting open on the foot of the bed.

"I've seen worse cases up and around in a few days," she stated tartly. "Is anyone else hurt?"

"Not yet," I was glad to tell her. "You run the hospital and we'll sit on the lid. Your shotguns saved the day."

"Tim Forrester will turn in his grave at not being able to use them on the rascals himself," she sniffed. "Don't forget the moon doesn't rise until about ten tonight."

"I'd been thinking of that. The evening shadows would be pitch black for several hours and men could slip close to the house. In the shuttered rooms now a ghostly twilight already loomed. Foley stepped out of a dim passage like a wiry, white-clad apparition.

HE LIGHTED a cigarette. The flame showed his face hard and grim. His voice was grim too, pitched low for my benefit only.

"You were right, Barnes. It's a submarine. The British are keeping too close watch on possible supply ships. Somebody schemed to use the yacht and this island for a supply base. Mrs. Forrester wasn't supposed to know anything about it. Her yacht has oversize fuel tanks for long cruises and can carry a lot of oil."

"Captain Craddock fired the other crew. Wolff hired these men. He's a

blacklisted captain who lost a ship years ago under suspicious circumstances and took to liquor running. Most of these men were in the same game. They're the pick of the bad ones. For the right pay they'd try anything. Wolff promised them five hundred a month and all extra expenses."

"Not bad," I said. "Did he buy Captain Craddock for that?"

"Ten thousand and blackmail," Foley said grimly. "One of the crew overheard Wolff and Craddock arguing. Craddock did a hitch at liquor running himself—and has smuggled dope in on this yacht. Wolff got wise to that from underworld contacts and used it to club Craddock into playing this game. He promised little danger. A shakedown trip from Miami over here to leave some supplies, and then back to Miami to wait Mrs. Forrester's pleasure."

"And she decided on a surprise visit?"

"Exactly. The crew wasn't told. When you appeared on the yacht and were locked up, they got the first idea that something might be going wrong. And then Wolff had to tell them that a plane full of people were going to land on the island and would have to be made prisoners."

"So they got ugly," I guessed.

"It soured the job for them. Five hundred a month for trying to smuggle sub supplies was one thing. Pirating an island from the owner was another. But you'd already been kidnaped, they were at sea and in the soup for fair. Some of them began to figure that they might as well take the yacht over and try to make a clean-up. And then instead of the sub appearing the first day or so as planned, it hasn't shown up yet. When our party arrived, things really started going to hell. They decided they were washed up anyway if

caught, so they might as well take the lid off

"They got at the yacht's wines and liquors. Wolff has soured on the deal too, even to ignoring Smith's orders unless they suit him. That blow-up by the hangar set everything off."

"And this man who calls himself Smith?"

"He's interested only in getting supplies to a sub. He's tried to keep the crew under control. They feel he's bungled everything and only hoot at him. There was talk today of forcing all of us on the yacht in the morning and leaving, submarine or no submarine. This man says he hasn't wanted any part of it but he's been helpless to do anything. Probably lying, even if he did stay sober."

"What a story!" I said prayerfully. "It would make every front page on both sides of the Atlantic! And we're smack in the middle of it!"

Foley grunted. "I don't give a damn about front pages. I'm trying to figure our chances. The guns and extra ammunition Mrs. Forrester dug out gave us a break for the time being."

"If we can hold them off tonight and tomorrow, they may get jittery and sail the yacht away."

That was wishful thinking. I don't know why I bothered saying it.

"I doubt it," Foley said shortly. "They're in too deep. A small boat or a patrol plane might find us in a day or so and broadcast warnings to pick up the yacht. No, they've got to shut our mouths now. They'll get us before they make another move."

"We'll have to count on it," I admitted.

Foley said: "I asked Mrs. Forrester how much spare ammunition she had. There's only a few boxes. It won't last long—and when it's gone . . ."

XVII

FOR a moment my mind moved out objectively and leered at Holly Barnes, standing there in the dim passage with Foley

"You wanted some excitement, son, to make a good story—and you certainly got it," I addressed the poor nut-wit Holly Barnes, standing there with a scowl, digesting what was probably due to happen after the scanty supply of ammunition ran out.

And the best Holly Barnes could think of at the moment was a savage. "I can fly that plane. If I could get it in the air, I could contact shore with the wireless and have help here quickly. But there's damn little chance of getting at the plane long enough to make a take-off! It takes time to cast off and start the motors."

"They'll undoubtedly be watching it closely," Foley admitted.

"One thing might help," I said. "They don't know I can fly. They must be confident that Lon Sadler is the only pilot. What did you do with that sailor?"

"I got some line from the caretaker and hog-tied and gagged the fellow."

"We'd better make sure the back of the house is tight."

Kerr and Hall the caretakers, had gotten the other rifle that Maggie Forrester had mentioned. Kerr was standing outside the back door, making sure no one crossed open ground toward the back of the house.

"Better get inside before a rifle picks you off," I advised.

Kerr was a tall, stooped Britisher, with gnarled hands and phlegmatic manner. But now he was red-faced, angry as he backed in the doorway and exploded: "What do those bloody pirates think they're doing?"

"They seized the yacht and are waiting here to refuel a raiding sub," I said.

"Gor!" he exclaimed, and looked at the other caretaker. "You hear that, Mr. Hall?"

"Maybe the gentleman's pullin' your leg, Kerr."

"I'm not," I said. "Think it over and call if any of the crew appear back here."

The young people were tense, worried, and trying not to show it when we joined them in the front room. They had been talking about Count Karilni who apparently had been caught out on the island somewhere.

Shutters had not been closed on the front windows. The sun was dropping fast in the west now and the beach was deserted. Most of the crew had retreated to the yacht. Some had taken shelter in the hangar. And from some point in the hangar, and from the yacht, several rifles had started spasmodic firing at the house windows.

We could hear the clear sharp reports. The smash of window glass, the smack of the bullets inside were almost in our faces. Fortunately the house walls were thick enough so there was safety in merely keeping away from the windows.

Young Rouch had the thirty-thirty rifle and was angrily trying to sight the snipers and pick them off. I stopped him.

"We may need that ammunition later. Killing a couple of them won't solve anything."

"They're insane!" Rouch exclaimed heatedly. "If we give them as good as they send, they may leave us alone."

"Would you leave a group like this alone when you knew they'd put your neck in a noose at the first chance?"

Rouch stared at me. "Are you say-

ing they're going to keep after us until we're all killed off?"

So I told the lot of them exactly what they were up against. Despite all that had happened, it stunned them. All but Maggie Forrester, who entered the room in time to hear most of it.

"So there is a reason for all this!" she said harshly. "I wondered what it would be. A submarine, eh? The fools!" She thumped her cane on the floor. "Of course we're going to stop them!"

"How?" I asked with an edge of sarcasm.

"Don't ask me how, young man! Think how! You're supposed to be clever! Now prove it to these glamor girls and their nice boy friends!"

And I'll swear she left a dry, rusty chuckle behind as she went back to her patient.

Bonnie chuckled a little too, though she was pale.

"Well, Handsome, think hard and show us."

"Do I hear a plane?" I said.

It was Lon Sadler returning. Men signaled from the yacht's bow as the plane landed, and it swung sharply, taxied nearer the yacht, lost way for a few minutes with the motor idling, and then moved around to the far side of the yacht and stopped there.

"There goes any chance of getting at the plane," I said. "Lon Sadler evidently stays on the yacht and the plane stays out there under their noses—and guns."

"Let's hope they're not through with Sadler now," Foley said.

And for ugly emphasis to Lon Sadler's peril, a high-powered rifle bullet ripped through the hurricane shutters outside an end window of the living room, shattered the glass inside and smashed the overhead light into a shower of fragments.

One of the girls started to scream and clapped her hand over her mouth

"He's back in the brush south of the lawn," I said. "Keep out of the line of the windows and you'll be all right."

THAT was scant comfort with a bullet every few minutes reminding us it might be death to look outside. In the dim closed house that fast grew hotter and stuffier, the tension began to be unbearable. You could see faces getting longer, nerves closer to the snapping point.

A little hope would have made the waiting vastly different. These young people could take it. With an even chance they'd have bucked up and been ready for anything.

But they had no hope. The big amphibian had carried them over the edge of the world. They had nothing to look forward to but the certainty that the small supply of shotgun and rifle shells would quickly give out and those hard cases on the yacht would break into the house and get them.

Thinking of the girls was sapping at the nerves of the boys. And the girls? Well, suppose you'd been one of the girls?

The sun was just setting when we saw a fast runabout race out from the yacht and head seaward. It carried no more than two or three passengers.

"Too late in the day to be fishing or riding for the fun of it," I commented.

Foley agreed with me. "Looks like a pilot boat meeting someone outside."

"The submarine?" Bonnie suggested.

"Might be," Foley assented. "Or it might be a boat out there that they want to head off from coming in."

The red ball of the sun plunged out of sight. Darkness followed fast without a sign of the small craft returning. Lights were appearing at the yacht

ports, the hangar was almost invisible when we were hailed from the south side of the house.

"Akoy there you in the house?"

I stepped cautiously out and answered. The speaker was somewhere back in the trees and brush and his voice had a nasty threat.

"Are you gonna come out an' give yourselves up or do we come in an' get you after dark?"

"Come on in if you think you can!"

"We'll burn the damn house over your heads!"

"Go ahead. It may attract attention to the island," I invited with more assurance than I felt.

"Tough guy, aren't you? Wait'll we get inside!" He emptied a revolver in the general direction of my voice, and a few minutes later I heard him crash through dry brush on the way to the hangar.

That settled it. They might burn the house. They could get close enough during the night. And sooner or later they'd break in. I hurriedly closed the front shutters and went back in.

"Rough, you'd better watch outside. And I want a pair of swimming trunks, a can of lard from the kitchen and a lot of soot out of the chimney."

Foley caught on instantly. "You won't make it, Barnes."

"I'll make the try anyway," I answered savagely. "It's the only chance I see."

"Better know what you're up against," he said quietly. "When we flew in yesterday, I saw a big shark near the water. And take my word for it, sharks are dangerous to a swimming man. There's barracuda too."

"They can't be worse than two-legged sharks. I'll want a knife and a revolver too. I think I can carry the gun."

"If you're a good swimmer, the

weight wont bother you," Foley yielded. "We'll have you ready in a few minutes. No use wasting time if you're going."

XVIII

I KNEW I was a fool to try it—but you reach a point where such things don't matter. They dug out swimming trunks and rubber sneakers. Bonnie was sitting on the floor by a dishpan squeezing lard and soot into a black mess.

The girls smeared me with the mixture, face, neck, arms, torso and legs. Doing something seemed to make them feel better. A bulb glowing dimly under a piece of paper gave a little light.

Bonnie stood off, looked me over and laughed. It spread to the others, and was the best thing that could have happened to them.

"If I met you on a dark corner, I'd scream and faint," Bonnie gurgled.

"Let's hope anyone who sees me does faint," I grinned.

Foley had vanished in the back of the house. He returned now using a carbide stone to put a last keenness on the point of a short, heavy-bladed kitchen knife.

"Jab in and pull hard and you'll cut like the devil" he advised. "You didn't grease your palms? . . . Good. The knife handle wont slip then."

That chilled them. Me too. There's something about the thought of using cold steel . . . They watched in silence as I fitted the knife carefully under the belt of the swimming trunks, slipped the gun under the other side and tightened the belt.

Maggie Forrester cleared her throat. "Young man, do you really think you can fly my plane away from the yacht and call for help on the radio?"

"I think so," I said.

She sniffed, looked me over, thumped her cane again.

"I think so too," she said calmly. "We'll all have breakfast in Miami. And if you have to use that knife or gun, don't get buck fever. This is no time for scruples."

"Breakfast in Miami," I promised—and that was all I had time to say.

Rouch's shotgun went off with a crash in front of the house—and Rouch yelled: "Here they come!"

"Douse that light!" I snapped. "Wait until they try to get in before you shoot! The shutters and doors can stand a lot of hammering before they give way!"

Bonnie snapped off the light before I finished speaking—and gunfire filled the night outside as Rouch bolted inside and slammed the door. Lead smashed through the wood after him and I heard him groan.

"Hit you?" I asked.

"In the leg! It'll be all right!"

"Make sure it's not an artery," I advised. "Everybody keep away from the door!"

I went out like a blot in the night. The closing door shut me out with the whining bullets slapping and spattering all around . . .

THE men were invisible, but the guns made little bluish yellow licks of light that might have been angry fireflies showing their brief beauty.

Fireflies of death! The threatening shouts and yells back of the gunfire had a brutal triumphant note. It made my skin crawl to think what would happen if they got inside the house.

But I wasn't standing there thinking. A crouching run took me to the corner of the house, grateful for the late-rising moon. Any light at all would have made me a perfect target as I started across the open ground.

The black grease helped now. I couldn't even see my legs moving. I had the knife in my left hand, the revolver in my right, and my heart was hammering as if I'd run a mile.

Other men might have been cool about it. Not Holly Barnes. He was excited, fearful. This wasn't like writing of murder and death. This was wild reality.

The men were coming at the house from three sides. They'd continued drinking and had worked themselves up to loud fury.

Ahead of me and a little to the left a gun blasted and the man whooped. Instinctively I dodged and almost shot back at him. Then as I realized he couldn't see me, he ran past toward the house.

The thought that I was going away from the house while they needed me desperately inside was hard to take. Half my fearfulness was of what might happen while I was away.

And *slam*.

I collided with a running form. The gun he carried up and ready almost, jabbed through my ribs. A yell of surprise (and fear, if I'd only realized) burst from him as his clutching hand skidded off my greasy arm.

My chest contracted spasmodically from the blasting shot I expected. I had my buck fever right there. I forgot the sharp knife, the gun trigger I had only to pull. I went berserk with a terrific blow of the gun barrel at the ghostly little patch of gray that was his face mouthing an oath.

No telling what part of the face I hit. The dull crunch of the impact cut his voice to a gurgle that was blotted by the loud crash of his gun.

It was an involuntary contraction of his trigger finger. He was already falling and the gun pointing away from me.

For an instant I expected them all to come charging toward me. I was running on before I realized that one shot, one yell meant nothing in the pandemonium closing in on the house.

He was the last man I met. At the first trees I turned toward the beach, running with long silent strides.

The men had reached the house. I kept looking over my shoulder for the gruesome red flare of fire. They must have believed my warning that eyes at sea might note a burning house. Shouts and gunfire were all I heard.

But I did hear the splintering sound of axes attacking doors and hurricane shutters. Then the muffled boom of shotguns inside the house.

A scream of pain knifed through the night. From outside. At least one of the attackers had been badly hit.

Then the soft beach sand was under my feet. I ran to the right around the cove. Some men had stayed on the yacht. I saw at least one figure moving in silhouette before the lighted deck ports.

The gunfire at the house dwindled to an occasional shot and the faint thud of axes. Which meant the drunken crew was still outside, proceeding more warily after the first furious attack. Not beaten off. Not giving up their purpose.

Everything seemed quiet on the yacht. The whisper of my running steps on the beach sand had reached no ears. No one was following me.

I came astern of the yacht and followed the curve of the beach on around. Now and then my feet crunched a crawling beach crab. I watched for the phosphorescent ripple that would mark the high fin of a swimming shark.

The sea washed audibly on the little outer spit of land I had reached. And I came opposite the yacht and stopped to catch breath before entering the wa-

ter. It was there that I heard the exhausts of a motor. A doubtful murmur at first and then I was sure of it. A bigger, heavier motor than the speedy runabout which had raced out toward the setting sun.

That would mean a larger craft coming in. And what craft could it be? What but the submarine Smith had been expecting?

The tension grew as I kicked off the sneakers, made sure the knife and gun were tight under my belt, and waded slowly into the warm quiet water.

XIX

I HAD to swim slowly, arms under and head barely out. Not a ripple not a sound. Not even a quick movement that would raise phosphorescence.

An occasional shot was still audible at the house. A match flared on the yacht deck as someone lighted a cigarette. And increasingly louder was the muffled exhaust of heavy engines. And then the softer snore of a smaller motor.

A flash of light drew my eyes to the cove entrance.

A powerful flashlight was signaling. The beam dipped to the side of the small runabout. A man was standing in the small boat signaling to some craft behind him.

A voice on the yacht, startlingly loud over the water, called "Here comes that damned sub after all! Smith'll have the last word now!"

And then a shout near the shore end of the wharf sounded like Wolff "Submarine! Submarine! On deck, you sons!"

The runabout was turning toward the yacht. A harsh voice, Smith's voice, cold and icy again, shouted "Turn on the deck lights! Get that airplane astern!"

I gasped, kicked wildly as the cool slick body of a fish brushed my leg. Then forgot sharks and ducked my head under as a stabbing searchlight beam leaped out behind the runabout.

The beam swung bright and gleaming over the yacht and the plane alongside, and moved shoreward.

And under the searchlight I thought, when I looked, I could faintly see the black silhouette of a submarine moving slowly on the surface under its Diesel power.

A voice crackling with authority shouted a question in German from the control tower. Smith answered in German.

The amphibian was moored bow-on to the yacht's side by lines run to the wing float spars. With my nose just out of water I floated as the runabout rushed almost to the plane and stopped with reversed propellor.

"Pull it astern!" Smith shouted angrily. "A stern quickly! Get ready to take ropes from the submarine!"

"Wolff's gettin' the boys back on board!" he was told.

"The swine! Now I'll show them before I leave!" Smith broke into German, and back into English to snap an order at a man in the boat. "Ram your bow against it! Push it out of the way!"

I was trapped there near them. But that wasn't what caught at my breath as the sharp bow drove hard against the amphibian hull.

I shivered for the brutal treatment the thin amphibian hull was getting. One gash to let water rush in and the plane would be useless.

The big hull drifted slowly to the stern of the yacht as men on deck tugged and the boat pushed. Finally the boat motor dropped to an idling purr and Smith cried:

"Good! Let it drift astern on the bow line! Is that you, Schultz?"

"Ja wohl! Heil Hitler!"

"Heil Hitler!" Smith replied automatically, and followed with an order in German.

The runabout backed around toward me. The conning tower searchlight on the sub was close now, dazzling bright as it blazed against the yacht. I ducked and swam under water as far as I could.

The runabout exhaust and racing propellor roared in my ears. Each instant I expected propellor blades to batter and tear my back.

But they missed me. The runabout was yards astern when I came up into the light reflected off the yacht's white side. Up . . . a gasping breath . . . the sight of a man sliding down the bow line of the plane . . . and down under water again. And even at that someone should have seen me despite my black face. There was enough light on the water.

All eyes must have been on the black threatening superstructure of the submarine creeping up to moorings alongside the yacht.

The searchlight had shifted when I came up for the next breath. Cautiously I looked around, getting bearings. The plane was silently drifting around the stern of the yacht. Someone, evidently Schultz, carrying out that order in German, was kicking himself up to a foot ing on the bow deck.

"Breakfast in Miami!" I thought . . . and swam under water again.

YOU think well enough under water.

I thought of Smith and those dead men back in Washington, and the cold-blooded callousness that had planned all this, even if hurting the women hadn't been in the original scheme.

I'd started to solve a murder mystery

for a good newspaper story—and I'd ended in this. Murder, piracy, kidnapping, breach of American neutrality. God knows what. And the arrival of the sub changed the situation very little.

In a few hours the submarine would be gone again with food and fuel oil. What did a raiding sub care for a few civilians on a British island? I'd learned from Maggie Forrester that her island was British territory.

Smith's angry shout a few minutes back had indicated that he intended to leave on the submarine Wolff and the mutineers would be left cock-of-the-walk. Then God help us all! The submarine only made more necessary that I get the plane off the water some way.

And a man was on board the plane and I was down in the water. . . .

I swam so far and hard under water this time that my hand slammed into the amphibian hull before I realized it was so near. I came up gently, let out breath with a soft gasp, and found myself under the wing. The man on the bow was fumbling with the rope and muttering irritably in German under his breath.

I reached up, got my fingers under the bottom of the retracted landing wheel, and pulled up until I could reach the base of the rear wing-spar.

The hull was so heavy that my weight caused no appreciable movement, as I pulled up over the smooth metal like a black ghost, dripped there for a moment, and then got a foot on the bottom of the spar.

It was easy then to inch up back of the high set wing and motors and rest for a moment, marveling at my luck. The sub helped. It was jockeying into position and all eyes and ears were busy.

Again I moved, crawling up over the high-placed wing, between the motor

nacelles, down over the leading edge of the wing between the propellers.

The plane had floated clear astern of the yacht. A bow rope held the nose. The tail was drifting on around. If the bow rope could be cut, the hull would swing on around until the nose headed away from the yacht. It had to be in that position when the motors started or the plane would surge forward into the yacht or wharf.

Men hurried a line back to the yacht's stern. I could see them heaving in a heavier rope or cable as I crept forward on bare feet, knife and gun out and ready.

Those men on the yacht were close. In a lull I could hear them as if I were beside them. One said uneasily, "I guess that guy Smith figures he'll have his innings now! Look at that machine gun ready on the sub!"

"Hell, they just don't want any trouble! Wolff says they'll larn as soon as they load!"

The man on the bow of the amphibian had squatted down to watch and listen. I froze as he glanced back. But it was only a turn of the head. He didn't expect to see a black, almost invisible form, and he didn't.

But one good yell would bring men running to look. And that would be the end of Holly Barnes. The end of Maggie Forrester's cruise party. I didn't have buck fever now I could feel my heart thumping, but it was only tension as I eased forward silently on bare feet, knife ready, the other hand almost aching as it gripped the gun.

He must have sensed me. I made no sound. The quick startled turn of his head warned that he sensed danger. I was close enough then to be easily seen.

God only knows what he thought at sight of the black crouching figure almost on him. I jumped at him, expect-

ing a frightened yell as he started up.

But his first sound was only a choked gasp—and then I hit him with the gun barrel. . . .

XX

I GRABBED and tried to hold him. His feet slipped off the rounded bow edge and his inert weight almost dragged me over before I let go. The splash sounded louder than a bomb. It was only partly covered by orders being shouted from sub to yacht, by engine exhausts thumping dully as the mooring of the sub reached a critical stage.

As I slashed the mooring line at the plane's nose, I saw the sharp bow of the submarine creep into view beyond the yacht's stern.

Schultz did not come to the surface. I looked once more for him and made for the inside of the hull muttering "Turn, damn you! Turn fast!"

There I was floating a few yards away from the yacht and the submarine. From dozens of armed men. There was a machine gun on the sub, and a searchlight, and undoubtedly an anti-aircraft gun that could blow the plane into bits with one well-placed shell.

The slashed bow line was hanging straight down from the yacht's stern and Schultz wasn't in sight if anyone looked. I had only a few spare minutes at the most. Maybe seconds as I stumbled into the pilot's seat and tried to get my bearings in a strange plane. I found the instrument panel switch and risked that much light. It helped me locate a flashlight in a holding clip. Then I had a frantic hunt to locate controls, make sure fuel lines were open, check oil and gas gauges.

Through the windows I could see that the big plane was slowly drifting on around. . . .

Then someone on the yacht shouted "Schultz! You're wanted, Schultz!"

Schultz did not reply

A man came to the stern rail and looked at the plane. He called Schultz again. I was invisible in the dark enclosed cockpit, but he seemed to sense that something was wrong.

Finally he noticed the rope that should have been attached to the plane. Rapidly he hauled in, saw the slashed end, and his yell was a smashing blow at my hopes.

"Something's wrong back here!"

"Here we go!" I said with almost a gasp, and reached for the starter switch.

The rising whine of the starter drowned any other sounds on the yacht. I saw a second man come running to the stern rail, and I swore.

It was Karlin! Marylin Forrester's Count Karlin! And if he was a prisoner, Holly Barnes was already an angel.

I knew now how Smith could tell the intimate details of Maggie Forrester's household. How he'd known of the yacht, the island, and Maggie Forrester's plans. How it was possible to plan far in advance every move from murder to taking over the yacht.

What a lesson Marylin Forrester would get out of this! Maybe enough to keep her in the humble mood she'd displayed at Tony Wingfield's bedside.

I cut the starboard motor in and stopped breathing as the plane shuddered and the big propellor swung stiffly. If the engine did not start I was sunk. Worse, I was probably a dead man.

One cylinder fired. Only one, . . . "God!" I begged "God!"

And then the bank of cylinders fired raggedly—and caught with a rising roar of sound! Sweet sound!"

While I cut in the port starter, I opened the starboard throttle even at the risk of choking the cold motor. I had to have power to start the big plane moving fast away from the yacht.

It gathered speed sluggishly and swung sharply as I gave hard rudder. I had to swing right, toward the shore, keeping the yacht between the plane and the submarine until both motors were pulling. The machine gun on the sub would slice the plane to bits if I floated past the yacht's stern into range.

Then I cut the port engine in against the starter. It caught also, built up speed, and the big plane surged forward.

They were shooting from the yacht's stern. Maybe they were hitting the plane. No matter as long as it gained speed into the dark and the cold motors kept building up revolutions on the tachometer dial.

I still had a bad problem. When I turned back, I'd have to make a sweep around the yacht and the submarine to get at the broader expanse of the cove.

I'd have to pass the full length of the submarine at slow speed after making the turn around the yacht's stern. And searchlight and machine gun would be waiting for me. What chance did I have after all?

COOLD reason told me I didn't have a chance to get past that machine gun. I hadn't planned for it. Now I felt a kind of hopeless frenzy as I realized how trapped I was after all. There simply wasn't enough water in this end of the cove to take off. And if I tried and missed, I'd smash into the palms on the seaward spit of land that half encircled the cove.

Maybe a hopeless frenzy was what I needed. Out of it I thought of something I'd have hooted at half an hour

earlier. The plane was paralleling the long wharf toward shore. The weather-beaten wharf formed a fence separating me from the broader part of the cove and the channel that led out to sea.

If I could get over that wharf-fence, I'd have plenty of water. I could cross the bow of the submarine some distance away, already going into a take-off. For a few seconds I'd be a fast-moving target. But only for seconds and going fast.

The plane couldn't climb the wharf. Couldn't ram through. But the plane was an amphibian with retractable landing wheels! It could run up on the beach, make a bumpy circle in the dark, and roll down into the water again between the hangar landing float and the other side of the wharf. There was enough room between wharf and float.

I could do it if members of the yacht's crew or the submarine were not waiting on the beach with guns to blast through the thin metal walls of the cockpit as I lumbered past. Or dash in and wreck the tail assembly with a well-placed shot or two.

In a few seconds of stress you can do a lot of such thinking. The beach was close ahead as I throttled the motors and reached for the retracting gear valve.

And while the wheels were making their deliberate descent into the water I feinted at turning, as if coming back toward the yacht. It might hold men back from the shore.

The submarine's search light was sweeping the section of water over which I'd have to pass if I came back. I could picture the machine gunner ready for his first sight of me. And as the wheels went down, I gunned the motors and straightened for the beach.

You take chances when you're in a frenzy. I drove the plane at the beach

as if I were racing to reach the house. The wheels found bottom. The big plane lumbered up out of the water shaking and bouncing.

And at that moment someone brought the searchlight on the yacht's wheelhouse into action. It swept over the beach and bathed the plane with blinding light.

They couldn't have made me a better present.

The light revealed beach clear of men. I saw exactly what was needed to get around the end of the wharf.

I'd have fired a pilot who bulled an amphibian around on land as I did now, driving the tail around with rudder and prop blast, gunning the roaring motors until the whole plane shivered and shook as it heaved forward.

They were shooting from the yacht. A hole appeared in the windshield—and then I was past the wharf, whipping the tail around again and lumbering fast down the gentle slope to the water.

I yelled as I felt the buoyant surge of the hull, and reached for the valve to bring up the wheels. . . .

XXI

HEAVEN knows what they thought in the house. Perhaps they thought I'd lost my head. All I felt was a wild surge of elation.

Now I had my chance! Wheels coming up. Motors heating fast and hitting perfectly. The landing float falling behind and the plane pointing out into the big stretch of open water, with the channel and the sea beckoning.

I rolled the dice for all or nothing and gave the engines full power.

The feel of it! I yelled again as I felt the hull begin to lighten and climb on the water.

The plane searchlight still bathed the cockpit in dazzling light. I was all but blind. But I had the feel of the seat under me, the feel of the controls and the knowledge that only open water lay ahead. I yelled again and talked to Maggie Forrester's amphibian as if it understood what I was saying.

"Get up there, baby! Get up there on the surface! Give it to me! A little more! Just a little more! Don't stick on me, damn you! Don't hold to that water!"

On a smooth surface they stick sometimes. The water won't let go. And then you taxi in a circle and make some waves, and cut across the waves to break the surface tension. Lon Sadler had reminded me. And there was danger in this placid night and serene surface.

But I had the feeling this was my night now. Nothing could stop me. And thank heaven for that Navy flying course at Pensacola where I'd met Lon. Thank heaven for those hardboiled instructors . . . I was rusty now I needed flying practice. I needed to get acquainted with this plane.

But this was my night and I was angling away from the yacht and almost abreast when I hauled back on the controls and bawled: "Now, damn you!"

And I was in the air!

What did I care about the sub searchlight that suddenly caught me? Or the machine gun and the rifles and hand guns that opened up? I was in the air and headed for the sea!

This was my night and I was howling! I shook a fist at the blinding glare from yacht and submarine. And cursed them as a bullet just missed me and smashed into my rate-of-climb indicator. I could fly by the seat of my pants. A hundred feet of altitude was all I wanted.

And a hundred feet was all I took as I roared out to sea and the palms along the shore blotted out the searchlights and the guns.

I'd done it! I was free and clear of the island, getting altitude with a pair of motors that sang like prima donnas. The gas tanks registered almost full. Lon Sadler had done all he could to make a break like this possible.

I climbed in a great circle over the island. . . .

Now the little lights down there were laughable and harmless. The men and the guns were puny, toy-like. The submarine was a helpless hulk bound to the surface. And me? I was a part of the free sky, the clean night. Me, Holly Barnes.

No liquor ever brought such a feeling as I reached for the radio earphones and set about contacting shore.

I tried for the Pan-American dispatcher at Miami, calling, listening, calling . . .

And the short waves brought him back growling, snapping through the static, asking who I was, what I wanted on his wave length.

I told him about the yacht and the submarine and the crew besieging Maggie Forrester's party on Cay Oro. And when he cut back in his voice had a high note of sarcasm.

"What are you trying to do? Kid us? There'll be trouble about this!"

And up there under the stars in the black sky over Cay Oro, I howled at him.

"There'll be trouble if you don't do something! Notify Nassau! Get some Coast Guard planes out here! Get a destroyer started this way!"

I gave him names and dates. I gave him hell and swore at him, not caring how much of the world was listening in on our wave length.

He believed me. No man would sound as crazy as I did unless he was telling the truth.

"Stand by!" he said with a new note of excitement in his voice.

AND five minutes later he was back.

"Nassau says steps are being taken! Coast Guards and Nassau are listening to you! What about that sub?"

"Do you think it'll stick around with me gone for help in a plane? It's casting off and leaving! I can see the lights! It's putting out to sea without taking oil or supplies!"

"I'm giving you the air," he told me excitedly "Stay as long as you can and keep up a running account of what's happening! Coast Guard, Navy and Nassau will be tuned to you!"

Stay up as long as I could? I could stay up all night with the motors throttled. Up there high over Cay Oro with the rising moon throwing a bath of silver over the ocean below and a box seat view of everything that was happening.

I didn't know then that the big networks were picking me up and rebroadcasting to startled millions of late evening listeners who hugged their radios and breathlessly followed the rising climax of blood and murder on this lonely island. Yes, even the radio down there in Maggie Forrester's big island house.

Cay Oro had ceased to be over the edge of the world. Up there in the night sky Holly Barnes, smeared with black grease and wearing swimming trunks, was bringing Cay Oro to eyes that had never seen the sea. Holly Barnes was bringing blood, murder, piracy and drama to millions who had never known violence.

I didn't know all that. But I could see the sub leaving, the yacht hastily

casting off and making for sea. And I had clues and details, names and addresses that I gave the law for quick action.

This was Holly Barnes' night to howl—and he howled it to the whole wide world. He sat in the sky in that big droning amphibian and was part of the sky and the sea beneath. And so also for brief hours were millions of listeners.

The fleeing yacht had less chance than a one-legged chain-gang fugitive trying to lose a bloodhound pack. No fog, no clouds, no mist. Nothing but the placid, moon-drenched sea on which the white yacht and silver wake were easily seen.

The world heard me—and so did two British subs coming at forced draft And Coast Guard planes and an American destroyer that came out from the Florida coast to be in at the kill as soon as the yacht got outside British waters.

Holly Barnes howled that yacht right into a net from which there was no escape. And the yacht's radio was picking it up. They knew they were doomed long before a Coast Guard plane forced them to stop sometime after midnight. They hadn't dared harm Lon Sadler who was a prisoner aboard.

And the sub? It's fuel oil was almost gone. A British war boat got it a week later, trying to take oil and food from a British freighter it had stopped in desperation near Bermuda. Smith was aboard.

Peyton was caught in his Miami Beach house. He hadn't been listening to the radio. Smith (his real name was Schmidt) had fingerprints that matched the prints on the automobile door in Maggie Forrester's Maryland garage. Caught cold, he talked. I'd been right. He'd placed the chauffeur there and killed him so he wouldn't talk. And

killed the pilot so the cruise party would be held up. And Karilni had been the finger man.

But all that happened on other nights and days. This night when I saw that the yacht was cornered, I turned back

toward Cay Oro and let the whole wide world know my plans.

"Take it away! I'm going back to the island and pick up the others. We're having breakfast in Miami!"

And we did.

THE END

Cipher Solvers' Club

(Continued from page 71)

Determined, Jackson Heights, N Y Fergie San Diego, Calif David A. Foulis, Yonkers, N Y Iris Goldthorpe, New York, N Y Huocous, New York, N Y S. A. Schaefer, Meridian, Miss.

Fourteen—The Butcher Boy Galveston, Tex *Edna D Brooks, Attleboro, Mass. †Marguerite Edmonds, Nowata, Okla Winnifred Meeker, Shidell, La. †N g'watch, Westboro, Mass. †Nejak, North Attleboro, Mass.

Thirteen—Asthuz Camden, N J Eureka, Arlington, Mass. †Junior, Chattanooga, Tenn. †F. Llewra, Flushing, N Y Technite I, Brooklyn, N Y

Twelve—Ande, Washington, D. C. †George W Bowesman, New York, N Y Ercole Pittsburgh, Pa. †Estece, Riverside, R. I. †Jack

Feuerstein, Brooklyn, N Y R. E. O., Indianapolis, Ind. *Rena Patton, Los Angeles, Calif †Oscar Raegim Dunellen, N J †Satex, San Antonio, Tex Ernest Harold Veasey, Sherbrooke, P. Q. †Virgo, West Palm Beach, Fla Harry F. Werner, Newark, N J †W. X. Y Los Angeles, Calif

Eleven—Ess Bee, Saranac Lake, N. Y †Joseph G. Brown, Chicago, Ill. Silver Dollar, Boone, Iowa. †Rain-in-the-Face, Los Angeles, Calif Gemini X, Austin, Tex

Ten—A. Ball, Ponca City, Okla. †Cryptonym II, Brooklyn, N. Y. Dave Farnham, Binghamton, N. Y. *C. F., Baltimore, Md. George Goldner, Astoria, N. Y. †B. L. L., Oakland Calif Maurice McFarland, Santa Monica, Calif

(To be Continued)

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An Aspirin For Murder

By H. Felix Valcoo

THE long, sleek, red ambulance of St. Nicholas Hospital flew down Seventh Avenue, whipping all traffic out of its way. Every few minutes the siren shrieked its warning.

Twice, Larry Dunn, senior interne, sitting inside, opened his mouth and moved his lips, but no sound was discernible to Arno Lesley, his junior, because of the terrific howl.

"For Pete's sake, Nick," yelled Larry to the driver, "call a halt to your acrobatics. I can't hear myself talk."

Nick looked back and grinned, "What'd ya say?"

"Stop tootin' your whistle," Arno spoke up and turning to Larry, "What were you trying to say?"

"Do you know where we're going?" Larry asked.

"Nope, didn't bother to find out. Premature infant. Accident. Attempted suicide. Heart attack. Maybe even a drunk. It's all the same."

"You're wrong this time. It's none of those things. Let your eyes rest on this order sheet," said Larry.

"Holy mackerel! The big shot himself! Tiny John Wharton. What could've happened to him? Another one

Prescription: Take two aspirins every hour, followed by the electric chair



"Look! There's something in his hand!"

of his stomach attacks?" Arno asked.

"I don't know," said Larry thrown back on his head as the ambulance screeched around the corner into 59th Street, "but that's a safe bet. He has a peptic ulcer and Davenport once told me that his heart is none too strong."

"How come a damn good surgeon like Davenport is working on retainer for Wharton?" Arno asked, his forehead puckering.

"That's common knowledge around here. Davenport and Wharton are old friends. They went through high school and college together. You wouldn't think it to hear him talk, but Wharton is an angel alumnus of Lamont. Wharton went his own way into politics never taking office himself but using his power to put his own men in. They say that today all of the city administration and half of the state belong to him."

"Yeah, I've heard that too. And on top of that he runs all the gambling, rackets, and white slavery joints in town. That's just why I can't see Davenport working for him—and only him," said Arno.

"It's very understandable. First of all Davenport gets a fat yearly check. That's tempting, even for a good man like Davenport. Secondly—" this time Larry's handsome face was catapulted smack into the stretcher as the ambulance wheeled into Park Avenue, siren wailing like a banshee.

Straightening his coat and putting his cap back on his head, Larry continued unruffled. "Wharton once helped him out of some financial difficulties. I've talked to him. It isn't that he feels obligated. It's just a sort of loyalty."

Arno's answer was thrown back into his throat as the ambulance ceased motion. That's exactly what it did. One split second it was in motion and the

next it was motionless. This delicate operation was performed by Nick who used his foot on the four-wheel brakes like a trip hammer. Larry often said that there was a masochistic streak in Nick since every time the brake lining cried out Nick was invariably hit in the stomach by the steering wheel.

Muttering profane phrases in his teeth, Arno backed out of the ambulance and Larry followed him. They found themselves in front of a large streamlined apartment building. The penthouse was Tiny John's living quarters and office. From that suite of rooms came daily orders in rapid succession to all branches of the state and city government.

It was said of this penthouse that it stood out far above any other in magnificence of decoration. A whole corps of French interior decorators had worked the better part of six months to complete it. Tiny John, himself, knew little and cared less for "fixins." But as he said, "It's to make people know I'm a big shot. I am. And I'm proud of it."

Larry and Arno with the stretcher between them were ushered into the foyer of the building by a liveried doorman. He'd been expecting them, he said. The elevator was waiting with door open, and before they could recover their palates which were forced into the pits of their stomachs by the upward speed, they were hurried out of the elevator.

THE penthouse door was immediately opened by a small wizened Japanese in a gold brocaded house coat, "You docta? Yes! Me Daikichi! Me send."

With a wave of the hand he motioned them through a large, sumptuous reception room into a smaller one that was obviously Tiny John's office.

"He there," said Daikichi pointing behind the desk

"Get the stretcher ready," said Larry to Arno and proceeded around the desk. He took one look and said, "Never mind, c'mere."

Lying sprawled on the floor was Tiny John. His position was completely relaxed with one arm flung out above his head. His fat round little body lay still. His face was pale, button mouth open as though he were about to make some quip. His skin was moist and clammy. Only his hair shot with gray was ruffled as though his hand in reaching out had combed through it.

"Open his shirt," ordered Larry taking out his stethoscope from his back pocket. "Just a formality, but we've got to do it."

Arno's fingers worked swiftly and efficiently. The shirt was undone and he made room for Larry to bend over. "He's dead. I'd swear that now without examination."

In a few moments, Larry nodded. Rising, he turned to Daikichi, now gray under his brown skin, "Call the police Right away."

The Japanese hurried out of the room and Arno turned to Larry. "What d'you think? Heart attack?"

Larry didn't answer right away. His eyes were busy studying Tiny John's body. Every square inch was minutely examined and suddenly his pupils dilated.

"No. I don't think it was a heart attack," he said slowly, "there's something fishy about this. Do you see that clenched right hand?"

"Yeah," said Arno, "What about—Hey, there's so something in it. It's—"

"Yes, it's round and white. Look here, Arno. I'm going to take it out of his hand."

"Quit fooling with these things,

Larry," said Arno. "You'll get us into trouble with the cops—and anyway here comes the Jap. I hear his footsteps in the reception room."

Larry dragged Arno over to Tiny John and made a dive for the object in the pudgy hand. Then they both felt crushing pain shoot through their heads and everything turned black and dreamy.

It was a sensationless world without time. How long it actually was before Larry felt a hurricane whip up his face, he couldn't tell. Warily, he lifted one lid and the bright light shut it for him promptly. He tried again and this time he succeeded. The other eye-lid opened and he could discern the fact that he was still in the same room, the corpse lay as before. Standing directly in front of him with a pitcher of water in his hands was a tall good-looking man of about forty wearing a blue pin-striped suit and a look of concern on his face. Larry recognized him immediately. It was Dr. Davenport.

"How are you feeling? What happened? Let me help you up," he said.

Leaning strongly on Davenport's arm, Larry cautiously rose, gradually putting full weight on both legs. The room dipped and whirled and finally stood still.

They turned their attention to Arno, rubbing his wrists and legs and massaging his skull. He came to with a moan.

IT WAS a moment before Larry could collect his thoughts and then his eyes traveled rapidly to the corpse. The white object was still clutched in its hand.

Helping Arno to his feet, he turned to Davenport, the sore spot on his skull angering him to suspicion, "What're you doing here? How did you come in?"

Davenport, taken aback by Larry's tone, was silent for a moment and then answered stiffly, "I had an appointment with Tiny for ten o'clock this evening. I arrived punctually and when I received no answer to my ring, I became alarmed. I'm his physician, you know I knew he was an ill man. I used my key and came in to find both of you on the floor beside him. And now, I suppose, I have a right to ask what you're doing here and what's happened."

Completely recovering his poise. Larry told about the emergency call to the hospital, finding Tiny John on the floor dead, sending the Jap out to call the police and finally the bump on the head.

"Incidentally, where is Daikichi? He and the police should have been here some time ago. We must have been unconscious for at least fifteen minutes."

"Poor Tiny. I should've been with him this evening, then this wouldn't have happened," said Davenport, "I feel terrible about it. God knows, I warned him that I ought to stay close by. But he didn't want me around when he had his business conferences."

Larry looked at Davenport closely and was about to say something when the thought of the servant and the police came to him again.

"Arno, see if you can find the Japanese

As Arno left, Larry made up his mind and said to Davenport, "Doesn't it seem odd to you that we should be bashed on the head? It's not the routine reception for ambulance doctors."

"Odd? It's damned outrageous. Who could have done it and why?" answered Davenport, indignantly.

"I don't know who but I'm certain why," said Larry slowly. Then he spoke rapidly, "Look here, Dr. Davenport,

I'm going to take you into my confidence. I think this is murder. At first I thought it might be suicide, but after being clubbed I know that I was wrong. It takes a whimsical corpse to go about blackjacking—"

"Murder! Aren't you jumping at conclusions, doctor?" said Davenport

"I'm positive of it. I'm good and angry about the crack on my head and I'm going to find out who did it and what's behind all this. You know a great deal about Tiny. Will you help?"

"Why, yes, of course, if what you say is true it's my duty to help. But outside of your headache, what evidence is there of murder? After all it might have been a petty thief who delivered the blow," said Davenport.

"It was no thief. I saw something in Tiny's hand and just as I went to get it, both Dr. Lesley and I were conked," said Larry. "There's a definite connection between that and his death. Somebody was trying to prevent us from finding out anything."

"What did you see? Is it still there?" Davenport sounded excited.

"Yes, it is," said Larry bending over the corpse and picking the object out of its hand.

"Well, that seems to defeat your own argument, doesn't it? Why should anybody bash you on the head for it and then leave it there?" asked Davenport.

Larry was fingering a white pill. He smelled it and put the tip of his tongue to it gingerly. "Hnum," he muttered, "seems to be a bicarbonate pill. Turning to Davenport, he said, "He probably was frightened off by your footsteps before he could get it."

"Did you say bicarbonate?" Davenport asked, smiling. "If it is, you can toss your murder theory out of the window. Tiny John always carried a pocketful with him. He'd take a handful now

and then. You know, he had a peptic ulcer, and bicarb relieved his pain."

Larry had taken a glass from the long, ornate bar along one wall of the room. "I'm going to make sure anyway," he said, dropping the pill into the glass and filling it with water.

A rush of bubbles came up through the water and popped in a fine spray over its surface. A faint sizzle could be heard as the pill dissolved.

Head close to the glass, Davenport said "You see, it is bicarb."

"I'm going to taste it and make sure," said Larry taking a small sip.

He rolled it over his tongue, and, convinced, let it run down his throat. "No question about it. It's just plain Sodium bicarbonate. But it won't hurt to take it down to the hospital lab and have it analyzed."

"That's a good idea," said Davenport, "but I don't think you'll find anything."

BOTH men seemed to sense a presence at the same moment. They turned to see a striking blonde girl. From head to toes she was a page out of a fashion magazine. She stood looking down at the corpse. No word came from her. Her face was rigid, the corners of her mouth distended, her eyes wide with horror.

With an almost inaudible moan, her features relaxed and she dropped to the floor.

Davenport ran to her crying, "Marilyn, Marilyn."

Larry filled a glass with water hurried over, knelt down and put the glass to her lips inclining it gently so the water would run down her throat and not spill over her clothes. Her lids began to flutter and color came back to her face. Before she came to, Larry asked, "Who is she?"

"Marilyn Sutton," said Davenport. "She was to meet me here to talk to Tiny. As a matter of fact she called me about an hour ago and said she was leaving. I had to hurry to meet her."

Completely revived, she now lifted her hand to Davenport's arm. Larry rose with her, steadying her.

"All right now?" Larry asked gently.

"He's dead, isn't he?" she asked weakly.

"Here, let's not talk about it, dear," said Davenport, "come, I'll take you into the other room."

As they turned to leave, Larry saw the purse on the floor. It lay unclasped with its contents spread on the deep napped royal blue carpeting. A small bottle held his eye. He reached for the purse, swept the contents inside, but kept the bottle. It was labeled *Aspirin*.

Larry hurried after Marilyn and Davenport, "Your purse, Miss Sutton," he said and was struck again, as she turned to take it from him, by her beauty, by the softness of her skin, by the graceful lissom figure, by the unfaked blondeness of her hair. There was something real about her. She wasn't dependent upon diets or cosmetics for her beauty.

His hand swung against the pocket of his white coat and the reality of the bottle resting there dispelled the enchantment. He became wary and cautious.

"May I ask you a question, Miss—you were here—"

"Here he is," shouted Arno interrupting the question and pointing to the Jap with him, "I found him slugged, bound and gagged in the closet of the master bedroom."

"Big hurt in head," volunteered Daikichi. "No good feel. Ver' bad."

"Poor fellow," said Marilyn sympathetically.

"Don't forget us, lady," said Arno, "we were knocked out too."

Ignoring Arno, Davenport turned to the servant, "Did you see who did it?"

"No. No see. Go telephone. Ever'ting black," he said.

"Then you didn't call the police!" Larry exclaimed.

"Ever'ting black. No call," Daikichi answered dryly.

Larry made a dash for the phone, called headquarters and in a few sentences explained what had happened.

They all sat down to wait for the police.

COMING off the wards the next day, Arno ran into Larry.

"Just the guy I'm looking for. How's about double dating tonight? There's a swell looking new nurse on the fourth floor who's floating around loose."

"Have you forgotten the bump on your head already?" Larry asked smiling.

"Oh no you don't, Larry. You're not dragging me into anything. I can see that you're going to get mixed up with this thing but I say that if they slug you for looking at a pill they'll decapitate you for sticking your nose in. Not me. Uh-uh. Count me out," Arno said backing away.

"Well, if you're afraid . . ." Larry trailed off.

The reaction was just what he expected.

"Who's afraid? Me?" Arno blustered, "I'm just as—pretty smart guy aren't you, m'friend. Getting me sore so I'll agree to stooge for you. Well, you're damned right—I will," said Arno with a sheepish grin.

"My pal," said Larry patting Arno's shoulder, "there are two things that I'd like to have you do. Will you?"

"You know me, Larry," Arno answered, expanding his chest.

"Nothing like that, Arno. Just go down to the morgue and get the P.M. report on Wharton. Then go to the lab, get the report on the specimen of dissolved pill and the other specimen pill from the bottle."

"Okay, chief. What're you going to do?"

"Me? Oh I'm going out on a date," Larry answered over his shoulder, hurrying out of hearing of Arno's curses.

In the cab speeding down Fifth Avenue, Larry mulled over the vague pieces of the puzzle. Nothing was clear as yet except that Marilyn Sutton was in a bad spot. He had no real evidence of the fact but he had a hunch that the aspirin bottle that had fallen out of her purse contained something much more harmful than aspirin.

He was wishing now that she'd be out when he reached her apartment. It would be difficult to question her, not only because she was such a completely delectable female but also because she was clever.

His musings were jarred out of him as the cab braked alongside the apartment house. Quite a pretentious place. He paid off the driver and in a few moments was standing at Marilyn's door ringing the bell.

"I'd like to speak to Miss Sutton," he said to the colored maid who answered the bell.

"She not home, suh," the girl answered, "kin I take a message?"

"I'll come in and wait," he said, pushing the door open.

It was a large, tastefully-furnished living room with soft divans and tappa cloth hangings on the wall. The room seemed familiar to him, and he realized that although he had never seen it before he had expected Marilyn's taste to be good, soothing.

He walked about restlessly, listening for the doorbell. Then his eye fell upon a writing desk in one corner. He didn't know what he was looking for, but he reached in and carefully sorted the papers. There were several endearing notes from Dr. Davenport who signed himself, "your one and only Bill." There were receipts and bills and a few paper clippings. He was about to push these aside when he caught sight of a familiar face in one of the newspaper articles. He quickly stuffed it into his pocket, replaced everything tidily, and called the maid.

"How much longer will Miss Sutton be?" he asked.

"Ah don't know when she'll come back," the girl said.

"I'll run along then. I'll see her some other time."

He left with his hand pressed self-consciously against his coat pocket, feeling the clipping. On the street he took it out and examined it carefully.

STARING at him from the news article was the handsome face of a middle aged man, a little gray at the temples and touched lightly with wrinkles of bitterness about the mouth and forehead. Without looking at the captain, he knew who this man was. Marilyn's father. With the help of the news story, the case came up fresh in his mind.

About two years ago, Alfred Sutton was a well-known banker. His business was open and above-board. He was known for his scrupulous honesty. Then because the city was so crooked, he developed the courage of an ordinarily timid man and organized a group of citizens to fight the crooked rule. A half year later, Alfred Sutton was behind prison bars, convicted on a charge of embezzling. There was talk, plenty of

it, that Tiny John Wharton had framed him. The whole thing was incomprehensible to most people because Sutton was known to have a large personal fortune. But a crooked judge and jury . . .

The story told of his release just two days ago. And added the ironical note that Wharton had been at the prison gates to give him a cheery welcome and make a speech about everybody's knowing he was just a scapegoat.

"Thus clinches it," Larry thought with elation, almost stumbling on the curbstone.

A cab swung its door open and Larry automatically hopped in. "The Wharton Apartments," he ordered. . . .

Again he was whisked up to the penthouse. He walked into the large reception room, which for the first time in years was quiet and peaceful, and tried to strike up a conversation with the secretary.

She was a small brunette with fire in her eye and a quick temper.

"Unless you've some business here, you can get right out," she said to his blithe crack about her charms.

"Look, honey," Larry began soothingly.

"Don't honey me, mister. The cops ought to keep all you cowboys in the zoo. Now get before I call for help."

"Don't get me wrong. I'm Dr Dunn from the St. Nicholas Hospital. I was called last night about Tiny—Mr Wharton—and I'd like some information," Larry said, seriously.

She looked at him suspiciously, seemed to decide he was all right, and nodded.

Larry pulled out the news-photo and showed it to her.

"Have you ever seen this man before?"

"Mr. Sutton? He was here yesterday

afternoon and there was an awful ruckus in the office. He came tearing out here later with red in his eye.

"Thanks. Thanks ever so much," said Larry, triumphant and saddened at the same time.

All the way back to the hospital, his thoughts whirled about in his head. Marilyn, her father, the bottle of aspirin. He was sure that it was an unusually bitter aspirin, and at the same time he hoped the lab would find nothing wrong with it.

In the hospital lobby he ran into Dr. Davenport.

"Making any progress?" he asked Larry.

"A little. Still interested in helping me?"

"Certainly. Anything I can do. Wharton was the best friend I had," Davenport said earnestly.

Larry led him into a small waiting room, which was empty. Davenport removed his coat, sat down and lit a cigar.

"What is it, something on your mind?"

"What do you know about Marilyn's father?" Larry asked, watching him closely.

The question didn't seem to shock him. "No more than the papers have been saying. Marilyn claims that Tiny framed—" He stopped in mid-sentence and continued, "But that's a common story, isn't it? Even a few newspapers at the time of the trial insinuated that Tiny had framed Alfred Sutton."

"Do you know whether he visited Tiny yesterday at his office?" Larry asked casually.

Davenport was silent, looking at his fingernails, shaking cigar ash on the floor. Finally he answered, "No."

"I thought you said Tiny was your best friend."

"He was," Davenport protested, "but there's a limit to what one will do for a friend."

Larry realized there was no point in questioning him further, and Davenport sensed this. He rose saying, "Sorry, Dunn. Maybe I'll be of greater help later. Let me know if anything breaks."

Larry saw him out the door and then hurried up to his rooms where he knew Arno would be waiting impatiently.

"What's kept you so long?" Arno asked, talking into the pillow as he lay on the bed.

"I told you I had a date," Larry said insinuatingly.

"Nuts! You just went to see that Sutton gal," Arno said. "She sure has the goods. How'd you make out?"

"Not so fast, my boy," answered Larry, smiling. "I was in her apartment but I didn't see her."

"What a sap," said Arno. "Talk about lost opportunities."

"I discovered something much more important than a beautiful girl—something that gives this murder a definite motive," Larry said softly.

"Not so fast, my boy," said Arno, a broad grin spreading across his face. "I told you that you went off half-cocked labeling the business last night a murder. Take a look at these reports." He nodded toward the night table.

Larry grabbed the papers. The laboratory advised him that the first specimen was uncontaminated bicarbonate of soda, and the second was unadulterated aspirin.

THE post mortem reported death apparently due to acute heart failure. There were a few unusual facts—the brain was covered with many minute areas of hemorrhage, not unlike the picture seen in death by carbon monoxide

The lungs too were filled with an unusual amount of fluid.

Larry puzzled over the report. There certainly wasn't anything obvious in this. His idea that somebody had substituted a poison pill for one of the bicarbonates now fell flat and he almost had to admit that this was a death due to natural causes.

Aloud he said, "You can't kill with bicarbonate or . . ."

He stopped short, then very loudly he called to Arno who had been watching him with an amused expression. "Arno! Go down to the record room and ferret out any charts you can find on John Wharton."

Taken by surprise by this outburst of voice from the usually soft-spoken Larry, Arno dashed out of the room to obey the order.

Larry threw on his hat and coat, hurried through the corridors out into the street where he flagged a cab.

"The Wharton Apartments and fast," he said with repressed excitement.

It was fast. Ten minutes for that ride through the city with the cabby thinking it was an emergency call. Larry bounced around a good deal. He wasn't as adroit in the interior of a cab as he was in an ambulance.

For the third time in less than 24 hours, he was shot up to the penthouse floor in that superspeed elevator. And again he was in the reception room smiling at the secretary.

She gave him a double-take and said this time in a friendly tone, "Say, I thought you were here an hour ago."

"As a matter of fact, I never left. I've been standing here admiring your efficiency. You're in on everything around here, aren't you?"

She was visibly flattered. "Sure, I run the whole—Say, what is this, another information touch?"

"Yes, it is," Larry said, "and this time let's not fuss about it. I know you'll be glad you helped when you find out what this is all about."

"Shoot. I guess you're all right."

"Think hard, then, and tell me whether Marilyn Sutton was here yesterday afternoon?" he said.

"That's easy. If you'd asked me earlier I would have told you. Yes. She met her father outside the door to the reception room."

"Did she go in to see Tiny—Mr. Wharton?" he asked softly.

"Not that I remember. I left the room just then for a minute."

"Did she have an appointment with Wharton for that evening?"

She looked through the appointments of the previous day, and said, "If she did, it isn't noted here, and I don't remember hearing Mr. Wharton mention it."

Larry's expression became shrewd. "Did Wharton dictate all his letters to you?"

"All," she answered, "except the very personal ones."

"Were there any such sent out day before yesterday?" Larry was holding his breath.

"Let's see," she said, running her fingers through her hair. "Hmmm—yes. There were several. I think one to Miss Sutton, and one to Dr. Davenport."

"Thank you, honey. That earns you a lunch—next week," Larry said, a faraway look coming over his face. Then he turned and walked out rapidly.

At the first public phone booth, he called Arno and asked what he'd found out in Wharton's previous hospital records. He listened to the answer with a gleam of victory in his eyes.

"What was that, Davenport was asking for me?" he said.

"Yes. Met him in the record room, and I told him you were in quarters. He waited for you a while, then left."

"Listen, Arno," Larry said, "rush down to Miss Sutton's apartment. Get in if you have to break the door down. Find out all you can about that bottle of aspirin."

"Okay," answered Arno, "where can I reach you?" but the wire was dead.

Larry immediately set off on a trip that led him to several lower Broadway offices. Within two hours he was hurrying into another Park Avenue apartment house, almost bowling over the doorman in his rush.

"Is Dr Davenport in?" he asked the clerk.

The clerk buzzed Davenport's apartment. "No, I guess not," he said, then, "Oh, yes, he told me to say that he'd be back in two hours."

Larry thanked him and walked calmly to the elevator. To the elevator boy he showed his card and said, "Dr Davenport asked me to wait for him in his apartment. Will you let me in?"

The card and Larry's appearance convinced the young man and he shot the car up to the twelfth floor. With a bad joke at which Larry laughed heartily, he let him into Davenport's apartment.

INSIDE, Larry began rapidly rummaging through all the drawers, with no luck. The wastepaper basket was next. He emptied it onto the floor and piece by piece went through the scrap. At last, torn neatly across in three pieces, he found the letter of which the secretary spoke.

He pieced it, and read it carefully. It was the termination of contract between Wharton and Davenport, couched in no gentle terms.

Larry stuffed the pieces in his side pocket, put his hat on and was restor-

ing the scrap to the basket when he sank into blackness again.

He came to in a world of spinning pain. He tried to move his arms and found he couldn't. His feet were likewise incapable of motion. Finally he opened his eyes. He saw that he was firmly bound in a chair, and sitting opposite him on the sofa was Dr. Davenport.

"How do you do, Dr Dunn," Davenport said.

Larry grunted.

"Is that all you have to say?" Davenport asked. "Look at this," he said, holding up a syringe with its barrel filled.

"What's in your mind?" Larry's pupils dilated.

"Just a hypo, my young friend," he answered. "This syringe is full of potassium cyanide."

"Look, Davenport, you're clever. What good will it do you to kill me? Arno knows all about this."

"That young fool! He doesn't know anything I talked to him a while ago and he said he thought you were crazy."

Larry was silent.

"If I put you out of the way it will be some time before you are found, and by then I'll be on a honeymoon cruise to Europe, with a one-way passage."

Larry said nothing.

"I thought I had committed a perfect crime until you stumbled onto me," Davenport said gemmally, rising and moving toward Larry. "Suppose you tell me just how your mind worked."

There was no getting out of this. Larry thought. This is the real thing. So he began to talk.

"Things fell into order for me this afternoon after talking to Wharton's secretary. When she told me Wharton had sent you a personal letter, I suspect-

ed that it was one calling quits with you. There could be only one reason for the termination of such a long, close relationship—one reason especially with a man like Tiny Wharton—and that was that you were crossing him up.

"I asked myself how you could be crossing him, and remembered Marilyn Sutton. Her father was in Wharton's office stirring up a fuss. He was determined, I figured, to continue his campaign against Wharton and the crooked politics in town. Wharton was mad. Mad as hell. But he was madder than that at you. Why? Because the way I saw it, you saw the opportunity of big dough with Marilyn as your wife. You played up to her, told her about what was happening between her father and Tiny. You promised to intercede.

"Normally, there'd be no reason for your sudden need for money but I checked on your extra-professional activities, today, and found that you're an inveterate gambler. You'd lost all your money and were in the hole for another fifty thousand. You were desperate because if you didn't pay up in another week you'd probably lose your life.

"The set-up was perfect with Marilyn. You did talk to Tiny. You not only talked to him, you argued with him, and I think you must have threatened to expose some of his activities. He became furious and immediately sent you the letter cutting you off as his personal physician. And he sent a letter to Marilyn telling her about it.

"Now you were in a tougher spot than ever. You realized there was only one way to save yourself, and that was to put Tiny out of the way.

"You were damned clever. It wasn't to be an out and out murder. It was something the courts would have a bad

time proving. But you didn't want it to reach the courts either. You knew Tiny intimately, all his illnesses. Bad heart and stomach. I found out tonight and that clinched it for me, that you'd taken care of Tiny some years ago at the hospital when he had a severe attack of *asthma*. He'd taken some aspirin. He was allergic to it, and you knew that he was terrifically sensitive to aspirin. His heart was in better shape then than it was now, so he pulled through. But you never forgot it. I think you had something like this in your mind even then.

"You waited. On the afternoon that Sutton came to see Tiny, you substituted some aspirin for the bicarbonate pills that he usually took. You figured pretty accurately about when he would take his next bicarb and you knew that the aspirin would be immediately fatal, sending him into severe spasms of asthma that would cause his already weakened heart to fail.

"You didn't figure that one pill would be left in his hand which would make me curious.

"You made sure to have an appointment with Tiny at about the time he died. You walked in and saw us reaching for the supposed bicarb. You were at your cleverest then. It almost made me give up the idea of suicide or murder. You knocked out the Jap so he wouldn't call the police before you established your innocence to me.

"When Marilyn came in and fainted her purse fell to the floor and opened. A bottle of aspirin fell out. That roused my suspicions again, I thought she was involved. Now I know that you gave her the aspirin, when she complained of headache. That was a mistake.

"You were clever in agreeing to help me. You tried by your reticence to place the murder on the *shunt*.

Alfred Sutton. That would have worked except for the P. M. and lab reports that showed no trace of poison, but did show minute hemorrhages in the brain, and very moist lungs.

"I realized then that it was an anaphylactic death—severe allergic shock—and the hospital charts, dug out by Arno, proved a definite sensitivity to aspirin. You were the only person with that knowledge who had any possible motive for killing Tiny Wharton."

"Right in every detail, my friend." He brought the syringe down, poised it to plunge it into Larry's flesh, when the door crashed in with a terrific noise. In a moment Davenport was down with a huge mass of men upon him.

Larry sighed softly, regained his composure, and saw Arno, three cops and Marilyn in the room.

"Are you all right, Larry?" Arno said excitedly while Marilyn fumbled with the rope that bound him to the chair.

"Perfectly. But scared as hell," Larry said feelingly. "How in the name of anything did you follow me here?"

"I went down to Marilyn's, just as you said. No trouble getting in. When she told me that Davenport had given her the bottle of aspirin, the previous hospital records on Wharton clicked in this flea-brain of mine. She told me about her dad and the promise Davenport had made her to keep him out of trouble."

Arno stopped, grinned, and looked at Marilyn. "It was she who rushed us over here. Thank her for your life."

Larry looked up into the girl's flushed face. "Something tells me I'm going to thank her all my life."



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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY 280 Broadway New York, N.Y.

In my opinion the stories in the June 8th issue of Detective Fiction Weekly rank as follows:

THE MASKED JURY by Judson P. Philips	.....	No. Here
THE CARETAKER'S WIFE by Preston Grady	.....
DEATH BEGINS AT 45 by Robert C. Stockman	.....
THE MISSING GENERAL by William Cox	.....
KILLER'S EXIT by Hugh B. Cave	.....
STAND-IN FOR A KILL by Stuart Towne	.....
THE BLOODY ISLE by T. T. Flynn	.....
AN ASPIRIN FOR MURDER by E. Felix Valcic	.....

Attached is my letter of 50 words or more giving my reasons for selecting

.....
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Coming Next Week

From early childhood he was trained in the art of guns and knives, in the science of physical skill; in all the intricacies of hunting and being hunted. Then he was sent forth into the world, spurred on by the knowledge that he was a

MAN OF VENGEANCE

By LAWRENCE TREAT

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

(On sale next Wednesday, June 5)

Handwriting Secrets

Character Clues in Pen and Ink

By Helen King

A RECENT discussion of "types" in this department brought forth a barrage of mail, which, condensed, had this import "Is there a person who is a perfect type . . . can you find it in the handwriting?"

In order to obtain a working standard, graphologists divided humans into certain groups. These were standard groups, as mentioned before, similar to psychological types. Most of us have been found to be a combination of two or more types; the man belonging to a single type group is less common than his more complex brother.

A psychologist will say a person has an "inferiority complex," yet that is a wide term because there are hundreds of grades of such a complex. This fact is well known by those who study psychology, but seldom realized by the layman.

Similarly, a graphologist may tell you that you are a "Vital type," yet there may also be a dash of "Material" and a bit of "Mental" in you. Depending on heredity, environment, natural aptitudes and current conditions. The trained analyst must know all this, but in presenting it to someone who is merely interested in a character reading, the analyst omits technical terminology and gives only that which he feels will be instructive.

Your doctor does not tell you of all the "itis" bugs that are harming you; he gives you his diagnosis and prescribes. If he started to tell you the "how" and "where" of everything, you would soon be receiving a medical course, and the poor medico wouldn't get to see many patients.

Typing, therefore, resolves itself into fundamentals, which all analysts must know.

Dear Miss King:

Do you believe a man can really get places today if he has no pull with local authorities? Does my writing show the ability to do this? Am I a quitter? I'm discouraged. I know I'd like to be a politician, as I really am interested in the progress of our country and somehow feel patriotic.

D. E. L.

*to be a politician
and have my*

D. E. Lawrence

Dear Dr. L.

You're not discouraged, you're just a bit cynical. A man who is honest at heart expects it of others, and when he does not find honesty forthcoming in the degree to which he gives it out—he just loses something.

inside him. He becomes a bit cynical, to cover up his feelings. Pull is necessary in a sense. The average politician starts out by running for small local offices first, joins all sorts of organizations, and works up a following. Gaining friends is a necessity for a politician. You must come out of your shell, a bit, to do this. Open up — be more expansive —, while you are still young enough to acquire the habit. You are more a statesman than a politician, but you will have to go through the mill first.

The writing of twins is just as interesting to a graphologist as the appearance of twins is to the average person. We like to study their writing to learn the similarities or differences, just as you look for some facial difference to help you in differentiating the pair.

Dear Analyst

I saw your reference to twins, and the same style of writing, but now I wonder what you would think of these two samples enclosed? We are twins—yet our scripts are different. Nobody knows that we are twins, but all know we are brothers, as all the kids in the family look alike. What is your diagnosis?

Jed.

*J. E. Doreau is the
writer*

Same as above

Dear Jed

You boys are fraternal, rather than identical twins, which means you are two brothers who chanced to be born at the same time but who are no closer than any others in your family. Identical twins are in error of each other, in actions and looks. Your writing shows a sharp, shrewd business nature. Your brother's is more of a dreamer. He will dream of ideas, and you will execute them. Both of you are very necessary to the welfare and happiness of any family or country. Thanks for adding to the "twin collection" of writings.

PURELY PERSONAL

ED — Why not study medicine? You have all the qualifications, most of the preliminary study, and certainly connections for your future work. You are luckier than most fellows, so hold your luck while you may.

B. E. — In later years the difference in your ages won't matter, but right now you must be considerate enough not to remind your fiancée that she is six years older. Six years, when the young man is only twenty-one is a hurdle to jump. Don't go through with this if you feel that you will eventually accuse her of "kidnapping" you. If you are that way now, what will years to come bring?

SON — Your writing shows a higher intelligence than most fellows your age, but that does not mean you are emotionally mature. It merely means that one side of your nature—the intellectual—is ahead of the rest of your development, physical and emotional. You must therefore use your good head to figure out some sort of a balance. When you have done this, you will be able to use your brains to better advantage.

LOIS — Your fiance is right. A husband has a right to expect a clean, pleasant home, in keeping with his finances. If you are not working, you owe this to him, without question. If you plan to continue in business, another arrangement must be thought out—possibly a part-time maid. But whatever you do, don't come home to a dirty apartment. Your home is more than just four walls, it is your sanctuary, and you should treat it as such.

Send Helen King, care of this magazine, a specimen of your handwriting for analysis. Enclose return postage.

Solving Cipher Secrets



M. B. CHAYEN
Sunbeam

ACIPHER is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ely are frequent. Helpful hints appear in this department each week. The first cryptogram is the easiest.

No. 133—Pictorial Paradise. By Penwig

'GXKA NUA GKUG TENK NKDBRZ NLEO GKSEYX TESNG,
EH GKX NXU (ZD ADB OEHZ OX?); GKXH, EH VBGGXS,
UHZ RUNG DT URR, NESSUK, EH PDDZ YRUSXG"—*NLETG

No. 134—Elemental Origin. By Vulcan

GBT NPKXE TU STONE ZSV UTFKV PK GRV V7SGR E OSFEG
GRTEV HTFSVX TFG USTL GRV UFSKZOV BFGRPK, YA
GRV ZOGPTK TU LPSV ZKV GRTEV EHSVZX TDVS GRV
EFSUZOV ZYTDV, YA GRV ZOGPTK TU BZGVS.

No. 135—Internal Heat. By tChemystic

CRYPTOFANS QUINK ZCUKTH EFOT AUZVKR NEPTO
KUFFKB YSFBCP USENAPUOR HFYPGOWNKAT ACFTE
NHVGHFANPTH AUKESENBNOPFUK ZGOTSR ZYRACUSUB-
FANS'

No. 136—Martial Message. By Londoner

XGAKENVOGZSSDX \NNSBPDHBC *ZWDF ZVENGF ZTTZA
*ZTTDCF *YNNE YNNEF *UZDTTC UDOUTA *LGZPXDIXN
*LGZPDXN FKZPF *FKZDP. PZBOUEA *PZRDF KNTDFU
*KNTDFU GBFUDP *GBFFDZPF LDPDFU *LDPPDFU.

No. 137 Elusive Lines. By tJaybee

KVBGVPUT PAQNRB, DIFYFAQB ZEFUQUEK HGKEUO,
RUHGFKXH VEQTBNO REBRKAEP MNAGUT HNQUQNLFB.
ZEOTUZZFQ HNOOAG, FOJKUGGAO, HFZZAKH HVFKM
HAGNETS, MKVPMGQB ZNQQNjh PFHUT UOGN NXQUDUNO

FOUR separate multiplications, all in the same key, make up this week's unusual offering by "Cryptox"! In each of these multiplications, the four digits of the multiplicand and multiplier occur transposed in the product. While each problem uses individually but four symbols, all ten letters will be found in the entire group. The key is a ten-letter word, numbered from 0 up to 9. The answer will appear in two weeks.

No. X-90. Four-Part Multiplication. By "Cryptox."

H	P	U	0	S	P		L	E	O		S	U	P		
T			Y				R						0		
<hr/>															
P				H				T				U			
H				P				S				O			
P				H				T				U			
H				P				S				O			
<hr/>															
PHTU OPSY OERL PSUO															

How many cryptofans succeeded in penetrating the protective armor of †Volund's military cipher, No. X-89, published two weeks ago? This cipher, as you will recall, was presented without clues or suggestions as to the type of system employed. And we feel sure that our solvers will await the results of this special test message with keen interest.

To this end, the number of solutions submitted to the cipher will be announced in a subsequent issue. Should there be not more than ten or fifteen answers forthcoming, the names of the solvers will also be published. Meantime, here is the translation of No. X-89, details of the system, and a specimen of the encipherment.

No. X-89. Headquarters, First Division. To All Infantry Units. Subject: Raiding Parties.—Every effort will be made by raiding parties to take prisoners.—Signed: Major General Jones.

Key: 1234 1234 1234....etc.
Message: head quar ters....etc.
Cipher: IGDH RWDV UGUW....etc.

This cipher is of the Gronsfeld type, the numerical key being 1234, with the symbols grouped by fours in the completed cipher. To encipher any given letter, count forward in the alphabet as indicated by the key digit, and use that letter as the cipher symbol. Thus, letter "h," with 1 as key digit, becomes I in cipher; "e," with 2 as key digit, becomes G in cipher; etc. The numerical key, grouping, etc., may of course be changed at will by the communicating parties.

This week's crypts start off with Periwig's quotation, where GKUG and GKX, GKXH and UHZ, correctly guessed, will lead up to NXU and the phrase GKXA NUA. In Vulcan's message, start with GRV and GRTEV, noting "E"; then get TU, USTL, and TDVS. In †Chemystic's

cipher, endings -FKB and -PFUK will complete KUPFKB, with AUKESENBNONPFUK next in line for attention.

Finality of symbol F will help with the pattern *GBFFDZPF, in Londoner's construction; and thus to FKZDP *FKZDP. Spot your own clues in †Jayber's Inner Circle cipher! The division by †Ragus uses a two-word key phrase, numbered thus: 012345 6789. Answers to Nos. 133-38 will be published next week. Asterisks in cryptograms indicate capitalization.

No. 138—Cryptic Division. By †Ragus.

G	A	E	)	K	E	A	Y	I	C	(	A	C	I
				K	A	Y							
<hr/>													
I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
I	T	C	A	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
<hr/>													
R	M	Y	C	R	C	Y	M	R	M	Y	C	R	C
<hr/>													
K E Y													

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

127—June is the month most closely associated with weddings, brides, trousseau, orange blossoms, bridesmaids, the best man, honeymoons, elopements, and a wealth of related lore and superstition.

128—It has been said that over six hundred and fifty species of butterflies and about two thousand moths are scattered over the United States.

129—At mighty Niagara: American Falls, Canadian or Horseshoe Falls, Niagara Gorge, Goat Island, Three Sister Islands, Whirlpool Rapids, Cave of the Winds, Rock of Ages.

130—Jaded journeying Johnstown jack-knife jobber jaws juvenile jaywalking jinx juggling jonquij jardinière. Jumbled jargon jeopardizes junior.

131—Feline performed violin concerto; bovine quadruped surmounted third planet satellite. Escapade aroused canine hilarity; concave table vessel plus bowl-like dining implement withdrew.

132—Key:

Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 B R I D A L T O G S

All answers to Nos. 133-38 will be duly listed in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for June. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

FLASHES FROM READERS

TO BEGIN with, we want to thank Mr. W. R. Cupps, of Washington, D. C., for his suggestion for an improvement on our contents page. The change will probably take place shortly.

At last, we have some results on the letter contest. So many letters arrived in answer to the first contest—April 13th issue—that we were almost snowed under. It is impossible to answer all of them, so we can only say "Thanks" and "Try again." No fooling, they were all good.

As for the stories and the authors, here's how they were rated:

STORY	AUTHOR	VOTES
Murder on Broadway	Richard Sale	14,150
Crime Without Punishment	Prentiss Agnew	12,950
The Man Who Could Not Die	Arthur Leo Zagat	12,700

Since the main interest is in the ranking stories, we will print only the number of votes recorded for the three best stories.

And now our congratulations to Mr. J. A. Amerlan, of Seattle, Washington, who won the \$10.00 for the best letter on the April 13th issue.

MR. J. A. AMERLAN

DEAR EDITOR:

I have watched stories and authors come and go in your magazine for ten years and for complete and thrilling reading I vote

for the long (not novelet) short story such as "Murder on Broadway."

A too short story is unsatisfactory to a detective story fan because he is no sooner settled down in his arm chair and gotten the characters straight than the solution explodes in his hands with an irritating bang.

A serial story is just as unsatisfactory because if you travel around as I do you are likely to miss an issue and, rather than wade through a long summary, you let the d—thing go!

But a long short story, such as "Murder on Broadway," is just right provided the author knows how to make it plausible and to give plenty of suspense as Richard Sale does.

Here's another thing. *I like a hero to be human and have sympathetic qualities*, like the crippled little ex-detective *Casey Mason*. I don't take the same interest in a story where the main character is so hard and cold-blooded you don't give a hoot whether he is bumped off or not. That's why I like "Murder on Broadway."

As for your feature novelet—"The Man Who Could Not Die"—I liked it yes—and no. Two thirds of the yarn was good and then, like so many novelets, it petered out in the end. I had the feeling that the writer used up all he had in the first part in figuring out an interesting and mysterious situation and then just dragged in the old German spy gag to get himself out of a hole.

If you print a spy story (and how I like a good one) let the writer play fair with us and indicate the situation from the start so we can guess the solution too.

My third choice is *George*, because it has a gripping human element and you just can't help feeling a tug of sympathy for that poor, misunderstood dim-wit who did the best he could.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

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